South Haven Tribune

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April 19, 2026

Photos by Don Campbell / PMG

Miss Blossomtime 2025 Ava Starbuck crowns Miss Eau Claire/Sodus/Dowagiac Taylor Costanza the 2026 Miss Blossomtime Queen on Monday night during the Miss Blossomtime Pageant held at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center. Pictured to the right is finalist Miss St. Joseph Gabi Fiesbeck.

A crowning achievement

Costanza wins Miss Blossomtime, SH senior named Miss Congeniality

By TONY WITTKOWSKI
Paxton Media Group

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Taylor Costanza is ready to carry on a century-old legacy in Southwest Michigan.

With streamers falling around her Monday night, Costanza thanked her family and friends for their support as she was crowned the 93rd Miss Blossomtime at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.

"I'm really excited to be able to show others what Southwest Michigan has to offer," said Costanza, who was previously named Miss Eau Claire/Sodus/Dowagiac. "I know my family and friends were super loud tonight. So, it feels really good to have such great families and friends."

Miss South Haven Maya Gonzalez models an evening gown Monday night during the 2026 Miss Blossomtime Pageant held at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center. She was later named Miss Congeniality.

Taylor Costanza will lead a court of Brianna Friedrich of Hartford (first runner-up), Emma Birkhead of Watervliet (second runner-up) and Maya Gonzalez of South Haven (Miss Congeniality).

They'll join their male counterparts, Dominick Lignell of St. Joseph (Mr. Blossomtime), Beau Kirtdoll of Niles (first runner-up), Antonio Jordan of Berrien Springs (second runner-up) and Giovanni Ayala of Watervliet (Mr. Nice Guy), in representing Southwest Michigan, at various community events, for the next year.

"This upcoming year, I want to be as involved as much as possible," Lignell said Monday night. "I've talked with the boys already and we all want to take part in as many events as possible."

Both courts will appear as a special attraction at the Grand Floral Parade, which returns on May 9 and is now celebrating its 120th year as one of Blossomtime's signature events.

Costanza, a senior at St. Joseph High School, is the daughter of Jennifer and Brett Costanza.

"The best part of this process has definitely been the dressing room with the girls, the bonds that we have and the sisterhood that we have formed together in the last three days," Costanza said after being crowned Monday. "And while we're preparing for this, it's something that we're never going to be able to replace."

See **BLOSSOMTIME**, page A4

Sidewalk repairs underway in downtown SH

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven recently announced that South Haven Concrete have been contracted to repair the sidewalk in several locations along Phoenix Street in the downtown area.

According to a news release, the repairs are for the areas where the sidewalk has deteriorated or settled over time.

South Haven Concrete began the sidewalk repairs last November and have recently begun removals on the north side of Phoenix Street, from Kalamazoo Street to Center Street.

"Most of the repairs are to the colored, exposed aggregate concrete and most of these areas are outside of the pedestrian travel path," the release stated.

The contractor is required to always maintain access to businesses and will need to cone and block off small areas of parking spaces daily for equipment and materials.

"The repairs to the colored, exposed aggregate is a difficult and time-consuming process," the release stated.

In addition to the sidewalk repairs, some of the brick pavers may have to be reset to match into the sidewalk properly.

"We hope to have the majority of the repairs completed by Memorial Day weekend," the release stated. "We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause."

For additional information, contact the Department of Public Works at 269-637-0737.

SH schools preps for parking lot project

District to consider buying new passenger bus

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven school board received an update Wednesday on a parking lot replacement project set for Baseline Middle School.

Kevin Dee, director of non-instructional services at the district, said the project is scheduled to begin this summer and be completed before students return in the fall.

"(The project includes) resurfacing all the way from Baseline Drive up to Blue Star Highway, coming out by North Shore," Dee said during Wednesday's meeting.

The project will include replacing the sidewalk from the gymnasium to the field and adding an ADA ramp to the football field.

Dee said the project will cost $772,882 with a 5 percent contingency for a total of $872,646 and the money will come from bond funds.

Dee also presented a proposal to buy a new 71 passenger bus that would replace an older bus. The bus will have a camera system, cargo storage area underneath and be a new gas vehicle.

Dee recommended to the board to purchase the bus from the Holland Bus Company for $144,958, which will come out of the bond proceeds.

Both items will be voted on in the school board's May meeting.

Other items

The school board voted to introduce a miniature reproductive course for eighth-grade classes only.

The classes would include two, half-hour classes at the end of the school year for eighth-grade students to review what they learned in the seventh-grade reproductive class before they enter high school. The course also adds a discussion on birth control.

Parents will be informed ahead of time and have the option to opt their child out of the course.

The board also approved the new firewall for the district's network services. The bid from Vector Tech Group for $30,200, which was chosen for the project.

The project is E-RATE fundable, which allows the district to recoup 85 percent of the cost.

Kaylynn Norfolk from the South Haven High School was chosen for this month's student pride award. The staff pride award was given to Kate Hybels, a success coach at Lincoln Elementary School. Pride awards are presented once a month during the school board meetings to at least one South Haven student and staff member. Pride awards are a tradition the school has done for more than 12 years to honor those who have shown excellence in academics and character.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

SH City Council reviews budget at workshop

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven City Council met for a workshop meeting this week to discuss the proposed 2026-2027 budget.

Finance Director Michele Argue presented the proposed budget to the city council and staff on Monday.

The proposed revenue for the general fund is $11,652,778 and the planned expenditures are $12,326,724 – marking an expected deficit.

The revenue for the general fund comes from a variety of sources, with the largest being property taxes at 47.54 percent.

Personnel costs are the largest expenditures in the budget at 42.1 percent.

The second half of the workshop gave city council and city staff the opportunity to discuss what has and hasn't been working with the new city council social contract.

Council member Dave Flack said he believes the Committee of the Whole meetings have worked well for the council.

"We like the COW – it is a chance to exhale, really get into issues deeper than we ever could together," Flack said. "So, (it's) very valuable for this team."

Council member Tom Capps said the council has been getting better, but could still work on being organized and following the rules of the social contract better.

"I think that we need to get organized, because it does make it seem like that we're filibustering," Capps said. "Sometimes we're talking out of line where we're supposed to have a rule where, if they've introduced it and he started the discussion, the next person would go around and he would speak last to replay to it and we have not done that."

A second budget workshop is scheduled to take place at 5 p.m. Monday, April 20 before the regular city council meeting.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

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BRONSON South Haven

John Campbell

May 2, 1940 – Jan. 30, 2026

Beloved husband, father, grandfather, brother and friend has passed away after a long struggle with his health. He is now at peace and no longer in pain.

John proudly served his country, joining the U.S. Airforce in 1958 and was honorably discharged in 1966. He retired from L&W Engineering-Holland in 2002.

He is survived by his wife of 32 years, Merry Dehaven; his children, Becky Hamlet of TX, Tom (Laura) Gendron of MO and Scott (Sara) Campbell of MI; his sister Patricia Brewer and six grandchildren.

Passing before him were his sister Janis Campbell and son Kevin Gendron.

A celebration of life will be held from 1:30 to 4 p.m. on May 2 at the Bloomingdale Conservation Club. The club is located at 16681 41st Street in Bloomingdale, MI.

Robert Griffin

Robert Patrick "Bob" Griffin, age 88, passed away peacefully on March 22, 2026 surrounded by his family.

Born in Chicago, Ill., Bob was the son of the late John and Kathleen Griffin (née Leddy).

Bob was a proud graduate of St. Kilian School where he cultivated lifelong friendships. As U.S. Marine Corps veteran, Bob cherished the training, brotherhood and the opportunity to serve, including his tour in Okinawa, Japan.

Bob was a proud member of Local 17 Heat and Frost Insulators Union for over 40 years. His dedication to union labor in Chicago was a defining part of who he was. Bob also invested in apartment buildings, later expanding into real estate in South Haven, Mich.

Bob was the devoted husband of the late Marilyn (née Pinn) Griffin, the love of his life for 59 wonderful years. They raised five children and were blessed with several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Together, Bob and Marilyn proudly owned and operated Griff's Inn Sunset Cottages and other properties in South Haven for over 30 years.

Bob's greatest joy was his large, lively family. Bob created countless memories with his wife and children skiing in Colorado and boating on Lake Michigan. Known for his sense of humor, he loved telling jokes – especially to his grandchildren – and took great interest in their lives, always offering support and advice.

A devoted reader, he enjoyed sharing books and engaging in thoughtful discussions and debates up until the end of his life.

Bob is survived by his children Robert (Mary Kay) Griffin, Michael Griffin, Daniel (Patti) Griffin, John (Kristi) Griffin and Nancy (Michael) Hills; his grandchildren, Ryan (Nancy) Griffin, Caitlin (Andrew) Galvin, Michael (Jenny) Griffin, Shaun (Jena) Griffin, Raeann (James) Burke, Christopher Griffin, Connor (Sydney) Griffin, Brendan Griffin, Abraham (Vanessa) Gomez, Katherine Griffin, John Griffin, James Griffin, Griffin Reidy and McKenna Hills; his great-grandchildren, Evan Griffin, Miles Griffin, Rhys Griffin, Michael "Mickey" Griffin, Clare Griffin, Josephine Griffin, Kennedi Griffin, Delilah Griffin, Reagan Galvin, Jack Galvin, Lillie Galvin, Ciara Galvin, Faye Galvin, Reese Burke, Hattie Burke and James "Buddy" Burke. Also survived by his siblings; Maureen Scanlan, Patrick (Patty) Griffin, brother-in-law Frank "Butts" (Barbara) Pinn and sister-in-law Judith Brice along with many nieces and nephews.

Preceded in death by brothers: Jack Griffin, Daniel Griffin and Thomas Griffin and brothers-in-law Patrick Scanlan and Jack Brice.

Bob shared a special bond with his youngest brother, Patrick, who often joined his young family on vacations, creating lasting memories and a lifelong connection

In his later years, Bob was lovingly cared for by Deb Renner Smith, who became a close friend. Her unwavering compassion and constant presence brought great comfort to Bob and his family, who are deeply grateful for her dedication and kindness.

Family and friends will gather at 11 a.m. on Thursday, April 23 at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, 20953 W. Hoff Road, Elwood, IL, for interment with military honors. Guests are kindly asked to arrive promptly.

There will be a celebration of life after the interment from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. at Chicago Gaelic Park at 6119 147th Street, Oak Forest, IL.

In lieu of flowers, donations to Caring Circle (hospice) of South Haven, or a Charity or your choice, would be appreciated.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence go to www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements are entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

David Fenske, MD

Dr. David Fenske, the man whose life was a tapestry woven with love, learning and service, passed quietly on April 9, 2026, at Bronson South Haven Hospital, surrounded by his loving family.

David Herbert was born in Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich., in 1932, the son of Harry and Esther Fenske. He graduated from Albion College in 1954, the University of Michigan School of Medicine in 1957 and the School of Aviation Medicine as a Medical Officer.

David was a Major in the United States Air Force. He served for 12 years as an ophthalmologist and flight surgeon, logging over 1,500 hours in aircraft and helicopters. As an Air Force officer stationed at the University of Iowa in the early 1960s, David spent three years conducting radiation research. He conducted some of the early research on radiation exposure and eye protection in efforts to prevent cataract development. This work was in connection with the effects of an atomic bomb explosion.

While flying with a SAC outfit in Arizona as a flight surgeon, his position on the B-27 was under the co-pilot's seat and in front of the atomic bomb they carried. David trained as a flight surgeon at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, managed the Flight Surgeon Department and served as Chief of Aviation Medicine and Medical Examiner.

David served as flight surgeon for Air Force One during the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, accompanying the President on flights out of Washington, D.C. He was chief of the Department of Ophthalmology at Andrews Air Force Base in Washington, D.C. and an advisor to the U.S. Surgeon General. He was also Chief of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology at Andrews Air Force Base and a consultant for Far East Asia relations.

In 1968, he was deployed to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. He accompanied his injured patients to Japan and Taiwan when necessary. David traveled throughout Vietnam, providing advanced training to medical stations in the care of eye injuries, and lectured to Vietnamese physicians. When not caring for U.S. soldiers, he went out into the surrounding areas voluntarily and treated Vietnamese citizens, whom he had come to know and care deeply about. During this time, David was exposed to Agent Orange, as it was widely used and its effects were not yet disclosed. He worked with the International Eye Bank while in Vietnam, performing corneal transplants on Vietnamese patients, and was Chairman of the Orphanage Project in Cam Ranh City.

David was awarded the Republic of Vietnam's highest civilian honor: the Meritorious Service Award.

After proudly serving in the U.S. Air Force for 12 years, David returned to South Haven, Mich., where he opened his medical practice and became chief of staff and chief of surgery at South Haven Hospital.

David was a private and gentle soul who found satisfaction and purpose in practicing medicine in his beloved South Haven, where he cared for local families for several generations.

David embraced every day as a new chapter in his extraordinary life. In his free time, he could often be found sailing the Great Lakes in his restored wooden boats or biking across the United States, Germany and New Zealand with friends and family.

He also enjoyed playing tennis, reading, cooking, kayaking, gardening, welding, sculpting, playing the piano, bassoon, and trumpet and building wooden boats. He once turned a humble telephone pole into a sailing mast, reflecting his resourcefulness, patience and quiet mastery of his craft. He was also always ready to serve one of his famous Manhattans.

A humble man who never sought recognition for his efforts, David's many achievements – from childhood throughout his life – were remarkable. Digging the grave for Henry Ford while in high school and singing on stage at Carnegie Hall are two such examples of his extraordinary life.

While at Albion College, he was a member of the Delta Tau Delta Fraternity and upon returning to South Haven, he quickly became a community leader. Commodore of the South Haven Yacht Club, lifetime member of the Michigan Maritime Museum, board member of the South Haven Chamber of Commerce, Chief of Staff at South Haven Hospital, volunteer groundskeeper at the Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum and State of Michigan Master Gardener are just a few of his many contributions.

David leaves behind his devoted wife, Sandy (Schoenhofen), of 40 years; his children: Jill (who preceded him in death), Kim, Eileen, Carrie, Emily, Jennifer and Alycia; his grandchildren: Jonathan, Mark, Rachael, Tre, Courtney, Audrey, Alice, Isabella and Henry; his great-grandchildren: Ashley, Lexie and Georgia; and his beloved brother-in-law, Dave Miller.

David also leaves behind a legacy of love and inspiration to all who traveled through life with him during his 94-year journey. His love and profound influence will continue to guide his family and all who had the privilege of knowing him, and these memories will live on forever in their hearts.

Those wishing to share a memory of Terry online may do so at www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

Pat Strawn

Pat Strawn was born on Christmas Day, 1933, to Carolyn and Don Colwell in Cheyenne, Wyo.

Remembering her with joy are daughters Cheri (Ross) Stein and Julie (Tom) Brill. Grandchildren Danny Stein and Jack (Lewis) Steller, along with great grandchildren Lilly Stein and Solan Steller, have fun and loving memories to keep Gma Pat close. Also survived by sister-in law Linda Colwell. Best friends Marie Popp and Jesse Cat were her favorite company.

Parents Don, Carolyn and Brother Gary Colwell preceded Pat in death.

She raised two daughters to believe they could do anything they chose to make happen.

She earned a bachelor's degree in Education and taught 5th and 6th grades in Appalachia for several years before moving to Michigan. She forged a career in university administration at the University of Michigan and retired from Kalamazoo College.

After moving to South Haven, Mich. Pat volunteered many years for We Care, South Haven Center for the Arts Board, Scott Club Board and Kentwood Public Schools Meadowlawn Elementary. She took part in the South Haven Memorial Library Book Club, Senior Center Euchre group, art time and exercise classes.

Cremation has taken place and a private family gathering will take place at a later date.

Any donations in honor of Pat may be made to Al Van Humane Society.

Those who choose to leave a memory or condolence, go to www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements are entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

See another obituary on page A3.

Al-Van Humane Society
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Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pet of the Week, Cinnabon!

Cinnabon is a 4-month-old puppy who is just as sweet as her name suggests. This little girl absolutely loves to cuddle and would be happiest curled up in your lap, soaking up all the affection she can get. Of course, she's still a puppy, which means she also has plenty of playful energy to go around. Cinnabon is ready to bring lots of love, laughs, and wiggles to her future home. To submit an adoption survey visit our website at al-van.org/adopt!

NOBO Meet & Greet

Join Al-Van Humane Society this Saturday from 11–2 PM at NOBO for a casual Meet & Greet with some of our adoptable dogs. Stop by to say hello, learn more about adoption, and meet a few pups who would love to make your next NOBO run a little more exciting.

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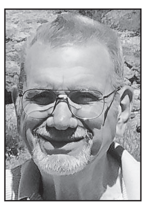
OBITUARY

Daniel Altenburg

Dec. 21, 1934 – April 9, 2026



Daniel Warren Altenburg, 91, of South Haven, Mich. passed away on April 9, 2026. He was a kind and gentle man born in South Haven on Dec. 21, 1934 to the late Clayton E. and Grace E. (Swan) Altenburg.

Other than traveling 20 years with the military, he lived his entire life on the family farm in Casco, in the house he was born in.

Per Dan's request there will be no service. Burial of his cremains will take place privately later in McDowell Cemetery.

After graduating from South Haven High School, Daniel voluntarily joined the United States Navy during the Korean War. After four years of service, he was honorably discharged from the Navy. A year later he re-enlisted, this time in the United States Air Force and served for a total of 20 years in the military, including a one-year tour in Phu cat, Vietnam (1968-1969).

After retirement from the Air Force, he moved back to his hometown of South Haven where he taught himself to make jewelry while earning an Associate in Arts degree from Lake Michigan College. After 10 years of selling jewelry at art shows he opened The Perfect Setting Jewelry store in Old Harbor Village in South Haven, where he continued to make jewelry until his passing.

On Dec. 26, 1953, in Kendall, he married his high school sweetheart Signa (Becky) Elizabeth Watkin. They were married 65 years until her death in 2019. Together they had four children, Shelley Jane (Jeffrey) Hollis, Phillip Michael Altenburg, Tracey Ellen (Peter Noirot) Altenburg and Lisa Renee' Nahin.

Also surviving are three grandchildren, Bryan (Brittany) Heisler, Rebecca (Ben Schrot) Nahin, and Erin (Ryan) O'Neil, four great-grandchildren, Makenna, Emma, James, Emmarie and many nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by a grandson, Eric Heisler and two sisters, Viriginia Carter and Audrey Sherman.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Salvation Army in honor of Daniel.

Those wishing to share a memory of Daniel online may do so at www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

Diane and Lisa to play tribute concert

By TRIBUNE STAFF

Photo provided

Jazz duo Diane and Lisa will perform a special tribute concert as part of First Congregational UCC's spring concert series on April 26.

SOUTH HAVEN — Diane Van Deurzen and Lisa Otey pay tribute to George and Ira Gershwin in a special performance at First Congregational UCC.

According to a news release, the duo will be performing at 3 p.m. on April 26 as part of First Congregational UCC's spring concert series.

Van Deurzen and Otey have been singing the songs of George and Ira Gershwin throughout their 20 years of making music together.

"Diane and Lisa always engage their audiences with their joyful banter and interactive style," the release stated.

They have taken their act to jazz festivals, blues clubs and concert halls across Europe, the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Since moving from Tucson, Ariz. to St. Joe, Mich. in 2021, they have brought their jazzy blues sound to vineyards, breweries and restaurants around Michigan and Indiana.

"Whenever these two artists perform together, people comment on their easy rapport and emotional connection," Tucson Citizen Chuck Graham said in the release. "Otey's piano and vocals are hot and steamy. Van Deurzen sings sweetly. Together they blend like a musical cappuccino with extra foam on top."

Tickets are $20 at the door and free for children 12 years old and under.

For more information, call 269-637-3804, opt. 5.

First Congregational UCC is located at 651 Phoenix St. in South Haven.

SH speakers series to kick off 12th season

Former U.S. Ambassador Brink to present on Ukraine

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BRINK

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Speakers Series opens its 12th season on April 30 with a presentation by Bridget Brink, former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine.

According to a news release, the program will begin at 7 p.m. at Lake Michigan College South Haven Campus.

The program entitled "Why Ukraine and Eastern Europe Matter," will explore Brink's own experiences.

Brink served in Ukraine during the early years of Russia's invasion and will bring insight into the war, its global implications and the future of the region during the presentation.

"She draws on her firsthand experience during one of the most consequential geopolitical conflicts of the modern era," the release stated.

Before her posting in Ukraine, Brink served as U.S. ambassador to Slovakia and held key diplomatic roles in Georgia and other international assignments. Her career in the U.S. Foreign Service has focused extensively on Eastern Europe and security issues affecting the region.

There will be a special reception from 6 to 6:45 p.m. where attendees have an opportunity to meet Ambassador Brink before the presentation.

"This is an extraordinary opportunity for our community to hear directly from a highly experienced diplomat on a topic that continues to shape world events," South Haven Speakers Series Board Member Joan Bauer said in the release. "Ambassador Brink's perspective from inside Ukraine during the war will make this a dynamic and timely opening to our 12th season."

Admission is $10 and students are admitted free.

All programs are recorded for later viewing on the speakers series website and YouTube channel.

The South Haven Speakers Series is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions can be mailed to: South Haven Speakers Series P.O. Box 572 South Haven, MI 49090.

For more information, go to southhavenspeakerseries.org.

The Mad Tea Party play to bring Wonderland to South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — "The Mad Tea Party" presented by the Pioneer Drama Service will bring the whimsy world of Wonderland to life in South Haven.

According to a news release, the play Brian D. Taylor will be performed at 7 p.m. on May 1 and at 4 p.m. on May 2 at Listiak Auditorium, 600 Elkenburg St. South Haven.

"The Mad Tea Party is drawn from Lewis Carroll's Wonderland characters," the release stated. "This original story has the same wit and whimsy as the classic."

The play tells the story of The March Hare, The Mad Hatter and Dormouse who meet for a tea party to honor Time, who has forgiven the Hatter and set time right once again.

"When the Jabberwock comes and wreaks havoc, the tea party guests – including the Caterpillar, the Duchess, the Frog Footman, and Tweedledee and Tweedledum – decide that something must be done," the release stated.

Tickets are $15 for adults, $12 for students and seniors and $10 for children under six years old.

Tickets can be purchased at ourtownplayers.org or at the door a half hour before each show.

For more information, contact info@ourtownplayers.org, or look up Our Town Players on Facebook and Instagram.

A focus on in-home services

Area Agency on Aging hosts politicians at Legislative Forum

By LOUISE WREGE
Paxton Media Group

ST. JOSEPH — Most people across America want to stay in their homes for as long as possible as they age.

And it is much less expensive to provide in-home services so people can stay at home than it is to pay for care in a nursing home, said speakers Monday at the 19th annual Legislative Forum and Public Hearing at the Regional IV Area Agency on Aging in St. Joseph.

However, Michigan is out of balance with the rest of the country, said Christine Vanlandingham, CEO of the Region IV Area Agency on Aging, which covers Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties.

Nationally, she said 69.5 percent of Medicaid-funded long-term care is provided through home and community-based services, with only 30.5 percent spent on care at a nursing home facility.

She said those numbers are flipped in Michigan, with only 38 percent of Medicaid-funded long-term care spent on home and community-based services through the MI Choice Waiver Program and 61.7 percent spent on nursing home care.

"In Michigan, home- and community-based services through the MI Choice Waiver Program cost $34,741 a year while a nursing facility costs anywhere from $85,000 to $130,000," she said. "So it costs less than half to provide home- and community-based services."

And yet, she said Michigan only allows 14,000 people to enroll in the MI Choice Waiver Program and once the cap is met, the rest of the people who qualify are put on a waiting list.

Vanlandingham said a lot of money could be saved if more people were allowed to choose the MI Choice Waiver Program.

She said they are asking for equity between home-based care and institutional care, which would save the state money and let people stay in their homes where they want to be.

Attending the forum were state Rep. Joey Andrews, D-District 38; Steve Carra, R-District 36; and Brad Paquette, R-District 37; along with state Sen. Jonathon Lindsey, R-District 17; and Josh Przygocki from state Sen. Aric Nesbitt's office, R-District 20.

The four state legislators at the forum said they support allowing more money to be spent on the MI Choice Waiver Program.

"We all support trying to drive choices that are going to end up saving money," Lindsey said.

He said the nation needs to rethink its priorities.

"What we collect from all of you in taxes is about half of what the federal government collects in taxes," Lindsey said. "Two years ago, I made the comment that if we just took the money that the federal government was spending on the war in Ukraine in funding these services, we'd have another $100 million just for this region. It would be generationally transformational."

He said he can make a similar statement about the current war.

"If we took the money that the federal government has spent on the war in Iran so far, we could fund this for the state of Michigan for 150 years," he said.

He said there are debates about if direct assistance programs are the right role for the government.

"But what is not a question to me is that our government funding is not adequately prioritized to serve the people of the United States right now, and it needs to be," Lindsey said.

Carra, R-Portage, said he agreed.

"As Sen. Lindsey was talking about with guns and butter, the more that we spend on perpetual war overseas, whether Ukraine or Iran, that's less resources that we have, whether it's spending on programs here in our nation or keeping it in people's pockets, and it leads to inflation as well," Carra said. "That's a hidden tax that people have to deal with – the tax of inflation."

He said nursing homes are very expensive and it doesn't make sense to spend more money on something that people don't want.

Andrews said he supports fully funding the MI Choice Waiver Program.

"It just doesn't make sense to me that we don't fully fund these sorts of programs when their impact is so high and their cost is so relatively low," Andrews said.

In addition, Theresa Uhrich, COO of the Area Agency on Aging, said they are asking legislators to support increasing access to home- and community-based services for people who don't qualify for Medicaid.

She said 6,635 older people in Michigan are on waiting lists for in-home care and home-delivered meals. She said older adults with unmet needs are five times more likely to enter a nursing home.

She said the Area Agency on Aging is asking legislators support the Silver Key Coalition's request for an $8 million increase for aging in home services and a $2 million increase for home-delivered meals, both in the Michigan Department of Health and Social Services fiscal year 2027 budget.

Uhrich said this would support the unpaid family and informal caregivers who help older residents stay in their homes.

"They're providing meals, transportation, helping with medication management and medical appointments, providing help with finances and countless day-to-day activities that keep life going for our older adults," Uhrich said. "They're often doing this work while working themselves and raising families, managing their own health needs and absorbing significant financial and emotional and physical strain."

Without them, she said the cost would be astronomical.

Uhrich said their help is even more important as the direct care worker shortage continues.

"If Michigan wants to help support older adults remaining at home, we have to first make sure we are supporting our caregivers," she said.

Paquette said the problem is lobbying at the capitol is immense.

"That is the root of the problem. That, in my estimation, is what has to change," Paquette said. "Lobbyists should be discontinued from purchasing anything for legislators."

He said some legislators say the lobbyists buying them meals and other things doesn't affect how they vote.

"Well, a $4,000 trip and $10,000 in free meals, I think, has a huge impact," he said. "I would say speaking to that, that is the root of our problem – the culture of the capitol right now – and that has to change."

Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Michigan Miss Amazing Queen 2026 Kitty McClintock, a MI Choice Waiver client, talks about some of her daily challenges during the 19th Annual Legislative Forum and Public Hearing on Monday at the Campus for Creative Aging in St. Joseph.

State Rep. Joey Andrews speaks during the 19th Annual Legislative Forum and Public Hearing on Monday at the Campus for Creative Aging in St. Joseph.

Christine Vanlandingham, CEO of Region IV Area Agency on Aging, hosts the 19th Annual Legislative Forum & Public Hearing on Monday at the Campus for Creative Aging in St. Joseph.

Christine Vanlandingham, CEO of Region IV Area Agency on Aging, hosts the 19th Annual Legislative Forum and Public Hearing on Monday at the Campus for Creative Aging in St. Joseph.

Older Michiganians Day

During Senior Action Week, which starts on Monday, May 11, is Older Michiganians Day on Wednesday, May 13.

The Area Agency on Aging is providing free bus transportation to Lansing on May 13 so they can meet with legislators on the capitol lawn.

For more information and to register, go to https://areaagencyonaging.org/advocacy.

For those who don't want to go to Lansing, a watch party will be held from 10 a.m. to noon on May 13 at the Campus for Creative Aging, 2920 Lakeview Ave., St. Joseph.

Contact: lwrege@TheHP.com, 932-0361, Twitter: @HPWrege

Photos by Don Campbell / PMG

The 2026 Miss Blossomtime Court poses for pictures Monday night during the Miss Blossomtime Pageant held at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center. Pictured from left, Miss Congeniality Maya Gonzalez, Miss Blossomtime Taylor Costanza, second runner-up Emma Birkhead and first runner-up Brianna Friedrich.

Queen contestants perform an opening number Monday night during the 2026 Miss Blossomtime Pageant held at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.

BLOSSOMTIME

From page A1

She decided to enter into the pageant back in November, "kind of on a whim."

Pageantry was something Costanza acknowledged she's never done before.

"I always love to try new things. This started months before, so we've been preparing for this moment," Costanza said in reference to herself and the other contestants. "But since the last weekend, it's been a whirlwind."

Costanza and her court emerged from five finalists, which also included Gabi Fiesbeck of St. Joseph and Kennedy Holloway of Niles.

Prior to judges revealing the Blossomtime court, Gonzalez was chosen by her peers as this year's Miss Congeniality. She is a senior at South Haven High School and is the daughter of Janet Aguero and Anthony Gonzalez.

First runner-up Friedrich is a senior at Hartford High School and the daughter of Sherry and Todd Friedrich.

"I feel so blessed that I've been able to enjoy my time with all the girls in the back and see all of these people supporting me," Friedrich said.

Second runner-up Birkhead is a senior at Hartford High School and the daughter of Angela Gendron and Kevin Birkhead.

"Thank you for giving me this confidence and opportunity to be on the stage before my community," Birkhead said.

For this year's pageant, 21 young women competed for the Miss Blossomtime title, with 28 young men vying for the Mr. Blossomtime honors.

A festive atmosphere

The color guard kicked off the festivities Monday night, followed by a rendition of the National Anthem. A glow-stick waving crowd packed LMC's Mendel Center to cheer on all 21 contestants while they represented their communities.

Emcee Lainie Lu Von Behren and her co-host, Phil McDonald, introduced the queens and clued the audience in on what contestants' preparation had entailed.

Early Saturday morning included a practice session, which transitioned into their individual interviews. After resuming their stage practice, contestants held group interviews, completed their final personal interviews with judges, and put all their work on showcase Monday night.

This year's theme was "Blossomtime ... Oh the places you will see," and featured an opening number that took audience members to another part of the world. The first part of the dance began in Paris, with a choreographed dance and phased introduction of the queens.

Each queen was eventually introduced individually, while they walked out to applause during the formal wear segment. They returned as a group on stage shortly after, taking turns at center stage.

Once the field of queens were narrowed to five finalists, they were each tasked with answering a question on the spot.

A special year

2025 Miss Blossomtime Ava Starbuck was accompanied by her court on stage partway through Monday's ceremony. Each court member gave an update on their past year representing Southwest Michigan and what the festival has meant to them.

"It truly has been the best time of my life," Starbuck said. "I've made seven best friends. We hang out all the time. I've made so many connections, and I feel like I've been able to support so many people in their lives because of this."

Bret McAtee, Lisa Bowman Walters and Steve Spears were judges for Monday's pageant, while Brandy Godush-Cox, Hunter Ackermann and Corbin Wagner handled those responsibilities for the Mr. Blossomtime pageant on Sunday.

Blossomtime Festival President Anna Abdelnour, Jeff Alisch and Anita Harner served as this year's production team, while Sydney Koenes served as choreographer for Sunday and Monday night's dancing. Harner also handled set design, while Nancy Schilling did the costume alterations.

"This year, we are celebrating our 120th year as a festival – that's very remarkable to keep these traditions as long as we have," Abdelnour said in her opening remarks. "This festival started off as a small apple tree, and then its roots grew and grew, and with the agricultural background in this part of the state, we brought you this wonderful festival and wonderful things for all the people around us."

Contact: twittkowski@TheHP.com, 932-0358.

South Haven Tribune CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292

Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

monster

0900 LEGALS

PUBLICATION OF NOTICE TO CREDITORS REVOCABLE TRUST

In the Matter of: The Mary J. Montgomery Living Trust

TAKE NOTICE: The Mary J. Montgomery Living Trust ("The Trust") was established on January 8, 2026. The Settlor, Mary J. Montgomery lived at 211 West Kalamazoo Street, Bloomingdale, Michigan 49023. Mary J. Montgomery was born on August 2, 1946 and died on February 3, 2026.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: Creditors of the Settlor, Mary J. Montgomery, and/or "The Trust" are notified that all claims against the Mary J. Montgomery Living Trust will be forever barred unless presented to: Beth Cook, Successor Trustee, of the Mary J. Montgomery Living Trust, within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Dated: April 19, 2026

____

David F. Kiel (P43048)
ORTON, TOOMAN, HALE, McKOWN & KIEL, P.C.
314 Trowbridge St., PO Box 239
Allegan, MI 49010
(269)673-2136

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF SOUTH HAVEN NOTICE OF POSTING OF PROPOSED ORDINANCE NO. 174 AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND ORDINANCE TO PROVIDE FOR A SERVICE CHARGE IN LIEU OF TAXES FOR DWELLING UNITS FOR LOW INCOME PERSONS OR FAMILIES (LIGHTHOUSE RIDGE APARTMENTS)

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that at its meeting on April 8, 2026, the Township Board received a proposed ordinance entitled "An Ordinance to Amend Ordinance 172 to Provide For A Service Charge In Lieu of Taxes for Dwelling Units for Low Income Persons and Families (Lighthouse Ridge Apartments)," which will be considered for adoption on **May 13, 2026, at 7:30 p.m.**, at a meeting of the Township Board at the Township Hall, 09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy, South Haven, MI 49090. The proposed ordinance would amend the Ordinance to Provide for a Service Charge In Lieu of Taxes for Dwelling Units for Low Income Persons and Families (Lighthouse Ridge Apartments) to change the annual service charge in the last sentence of the section from 4% to 1% of the Annual Shelter Rent actually collected.

The proposed ordinance is available in its entirety for public inspection. The proposed ordinance is posted at the office of the Township Clerk, 09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy, South Haven, MI 49090 and on the website of the Charter Township of South Haven, http://www.southhaventwp.com.

Brenda Bertorelli, Clerk
South Haven Township Hall
09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy
South Haven, MI 49090
(269) 637-3305

0900 LEGALS

Public Notice City of Bangor

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the **Public Accuracy Test** for the **May 5, 2026 Local General Election** has been scheduled for **Wednesday 4/29/2025 at 10:30 AM** in the **City Hall Council Room, 257 West Monroe St. Bangor, Michigan**.

The Public Accuracy Test is conducted to demonstrate that the program and computer that will be used to tabulate the results of the election, counts the votes in the manner prescribed by law.

Shelly Umbanhowar
City of Bangor Clerk

PUBLIC NOTICE – REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Covert Township is seeking proposals from qualified organizations to provide services for residents age 60 and older. Services may include, but are not limited to, senior programming, transportation, nutrition services, in-home assistance, and health and wellness support.

The contract is expected to begin **January 1, 2027**, for an initial one-year term, with the option for annual renewal. The contract is

0900 LEGALS

contingent upon voter approval of a senior services millage in August 2026.

Interested organizations may view the full RFP and submission details online at Coverttwp.com or by contacting:
Covert Township
Attn: Laura Fogarty, Office Manager
73943 E. Lake St., P.O. Box 35
Covert, MI 49043
officemanager@coverttwp.com , (269) 764-5138

Proposal deadline: In-Hand Friday, May 8, 2026 by noon
Covert Township reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and to award the contract in the best interest of the Township.

CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE PLANNING COMMISSION

On Thursday, May 7, 2026, the Planning Commission for the City of South Haven will hear public comments related to the following request(s). The public hearing(s) will be held at 7:00 P.M. at City Hall, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven concerning the following:

1. Special Land Use Application – 225 North Shore Drive, #1
David and Melissa Dimock have submitted a special land use application to use the dwelling unit located at 225 North Shore Dr, #1 in the City of South Haven as a short-term rental. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-726-038-00.

2. Special Land Use Application – 424 Quaker Street, #1
Alan Vochaska has submitted a special land use application to use the dwelling unit located at 424 Quaker St, #1 in the City of South Haven as a short-term rental. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-128-001-00.

3. Zoning Map Amendment (Conditional Rezoning) Application – 120 Baseline Road and 201 Webster Avenue
Mr. David Wiatrowski, on behalf of 120 Baseline LLC, has submitted an application to conditionally rezone the property located at 120 Baseline Rd and 201 Webster Ave in the City of South Haven. The parcel at 120 Baseline Rd is approximately 7.53-acres and is currently zoned RM-1 Multiple-Family Residential. The parcel at 201 Webster Ave is approximately 0.13-acres and is currently zoned R-1B Single-Family Residential. The property owner seeks to rezone both parcels to MHC Manufactured Housing Community District and has voluntarily offered in writing conditions to the proposed rezoning of the land. The parcel numbers for the referenced addresses are 80-53-895-030-00 and 80-53-750-021-00.

Supporting documentation is available for review at the Building Services office, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090, during normal business hours. Written comments may be submitted in lieu of or in addition to a personal appearance.

Written comments must be received no later than 12 p.m. (noon) on Thursday, May 7, 2026. Written comments should be addressed to the Planning Commission and must be submitted to the Zoning Administrator at kdissette@southhavenmi.gov or via postal mail addressed to the Planning Commission and sent to 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090.

Individuals requesting reasonable accommodation for impairments or disabilities should contact the City Clerk no later than five days prior to the public hearing in person at City Hall, at 269-637-0750, or at mkiker@southhavenmi.gov.

Kelly Getman-Dissette
Zoning Administrator
(269)637-0760 kdissette@southhavenmi.gov

RESERVE THIS SPACE TODAY!

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF SOUTH HAVEN NOTICE OF POSTING OF PROPOSED ORDINANCE NO. 173 AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND ORDINANCE TO PROVIDE FOR A PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that at its meeting on April 8, 2026, the Township Board received a proposed ordinance entitled "An Ordinance To Amend Ordinance 167 To Provide For A Payment In Lieu Of Taxes," which will be considered for adoption on May 13, 2026, at 7:30 p.m., at a meeting of the Township Board at the Township Hall, 09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy, South Haven, MI 49090. The proposed ordinance would amend PILOT Ordinance for Sunset Grove to add the Authority as a third-party beneficiary to the Township's contract with Samaritas Affordable Living Sunset Grove LDHA LP.

The proposed ordinance is available in its entirety for public inspection. The proposed ordinance is posted at the office of the Township Clerk, 09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy, South Haven, MI 49090 and on the website of the Charter Township of South Haven, http://www.southhaventwp.com.

Brenda Bertorelli, Clerk
South Haven Township Hall
09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy
South Haven, MI 49090
(269) 637-3305

SOUTH HAVEN CHARTER TOWNSHIP SYNOPSIS REGULAR MEETING APRIL 8, 2026

PRESENT: Poole, Wiatrowski, Fisher, Lewandowski, Bertorelli, and Stein
ABSENT: DeGrandchamp
Motion to approve March 11, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes.
Chief Adam DeBoer gave a report for SHPD. **Chief Brandon Hinz** gave a report for SHAES. Gail Gladney gave a report for VBCounty.
Motion to approve the Agenda with the addition of New Business 8.A-1
Natalie Baggio of Corewell Health was in attendance to speak about a 15,000 Sq.Ft. medical center they are building on Phoenix Road.
A Land Division Amendment was presented. Board members request that the Planning Commission give their feedback on a resolution for this township.
A Lawn Maintenance contract was approved with Moreno and Sons.
Motion to approve Resolution 26-08 To Introduce Ordinance 173 to Amend Ordinance 167 adopting language approved by MSHDA.
Motion to approve Resolution 26-09 To Introduce Ordinance 174 to Amend Ordinance 172 changing the Pilot rate.
Motion to approve Resolution 26-10 Approving Ballot Language for a Road Millage.
Motion to approve Resolution 26-11 a Resolution in support of a Brownfield Plan for SOHA Drift Lofts.
Reports were received. W.C.Askew from the Road Commission was in attendance along with Bret Witkowski.
Motion to approve payment of bills in the amount of $260,543.58.
Meeting was adjourned at 9:09 p.m.
Respectfully submitted, Brenda Bertorelli, Clerk

Photo provided

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce welcomed Clear Veil Marketing Inc. as a new chamber member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

Clear Veil offers marketing services in South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Clear Veil Marketing Inc. as a new chamber member.

According to a news release, Clear Veil Marketing Inc. was founded after eight years of creating and running successful companies.

Through that experience, the founder recognized common challenges businesses face and decided to offer expertise as a service to help other companies grow and thrive.

"With Clear Veil, our mission is to provide transparent marketing solutions backed by a ground up approach to understanding what each company truly needs," the founder said in the release.

Clear Veil, as a new chamber member, can extend support from national clients to local businesses, helping entrepreneurs and established companies alike with helpful tools such as website design and development, digital marketing, social media management, Airbnb communications and operational consulting.

"As a member of the South Haven business community, we're excited to bring modern business practices to the area and help local companies succeed," the founder said in the release. "We see tremendous opportunity to support our neighbors and contribute to the vibrancy of our local economy."

To learn more about Clear Veil Marketing Inc. or to schedule a free meeting, go to www.clearveilmarketing.com.

Allegan offers free boating safety classes to the public

By TRIBUNE STAFF

ALLEGAN — Summer boating season is just around the corner and the Allegan County Sheriff's Office Marine Division is offering boating safety classes to the public at no cost.

According to a news release, the purpose of the classes is to instruct citizens about boating safety as well as current boating laws in the State of Michigan.

In order to legally operate motorized watercraft in Michigan, the state requires people born after July 1, 1996 to attend and successfully complete a boating safety course and have a valid boating safety certificate while on the water.

"Those persons wishing to legally operate a Personal Watercraft must be at least 16 years of age and born after Dec. 3, 1978," the release stated. "They also must possess a valid boating safety certificate while on the water. Other restrictions may apply."

The courses being offered this spring and summer include:

■ Allegan County Sheriff's Office from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on April 25

■ Plainwell Middle School from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on May 2.

■ Saugatuck Yacht Club from 6 to 9 p.m. on May 20 and 21.

■ Martin High School from 6 to 9 p.m. on May 27 and 28.

■ Green Lake Calvary Church from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on May 30.

■ Sandy Pines Resort from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on June 13.

■ Saugatuck Yacht Club from 6 to 9 p.m. on June 17 and 18.

Children under 12 years old may take the class, however a parent or guardian are required to attend with them.

To register for a Boater Safety Class, go to the Sheriff's Office website at cms.allegancounty.org/sheriff/Patrol/SitePages/Marine.aspx or the Department of Natural Resources website at michigan.storefront.kalkomey.com/em/programs/9.

For more information about the courses, contact the Allegan County Sheriff's Office.

Historical association to host true crime event

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The Historical Association of South Haven will host an evening of true crime as local author, Tobin T. Buhk presents "The Clink: Inside Michigan's Historic Jails".

According to a news release, the program will take place at 7 p.m. on April 21 and will be a deep dive into Buhk's latest book which details the historic buildings that housed Michigan's prisoners.

"From the front, they resembled fashionable estates, complete with ornate facades and turrets – but behind the stately doors were cell blocks crowded with prisoners, ranging from chicken thieves to serial killers," the release stated. "The sheriffs' deputies who guarded them were an equally colorful cast."

Using archival photographs and diagrams, Buhk will lead a guided tour of these forbidden places and introduce the people who populated these buildings.

A native of Grand Rapids, Buhk received his master's degree in English from Michigan State University and a master's degree in education from Western Michigan.

The program is free and open to the public.

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Program Requirements
- Must be homeowner-occupied
- Must be a structural house (no mobile homes)

Eligible Service Areas
- City and Township of South Haven
- City of Allegan
- City and Township of Holland/Zeeland

Apply now while funds are available.

Visit our website or scan the QR code to fill out an interest form — your first step in the application process!

lakeshorehabitat.org/home-repair-program
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(616) 393-8001 ext. 110

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

South Haven Memorial Library: Bridge Card Game from 1 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday. Open to the public. Beginners are welcome.

Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for students grades 6 through 12 every Monday from 3 to 5 p.m.

April

21 – Scott Club: Journey to the End of the World – The Falkland Islands, South Georgia and Antartica. Location to be determined. Begins at 1 p.m.

21 – Scott Club: Rotary Club: Evening meeting at the American Legion beginning at 530p. Presentation will be by Anthony Marsala Sr. of the US Coast Guard Auxiliary.

21 – Baseball: Boys varsity team against Coloma High School at 4 p.m.

21 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Coloma High School at 4 p.m.

21 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Black River Public School at 4:30 p.m.

22 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

23 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Allegan Public Schools at 4:30 p.m.

24: South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafe from 11 a.m. to noon.

25 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "Invasive Species: What to Know Before You Start Planting" with Jena Johnson from the Van Buren Conservation District from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m.

27 – Golf: Boys varsity team compete in the SAC Jam at 4 p.m. at Hawkshead.

27 – Track: Boys and girls teams compete in the SAC Tri with Allegan and Coloma schools at 4:30 p.m.

27 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Bloomingdale High School at 5 p.m.

27 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Coloma High School at 6:15 p.m.

28 – Rotary Club: Morning meeting. Presentation will be by Nicholas Dalton on Rural Development Enterprise as Economic/Business Development.

28 – Track: Boys and girls middle school teams compete in the SAC Quad at 4:30 p.m.

28 – Baseball: Boys varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

28 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Girls junior varsity team against Hartford Public School at 5 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Bridgman Public School at 5 p.m.

29 –Soccer: Girls middle school team against Plainwell Schools at 6:15 p.m.

The Spotlight

A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

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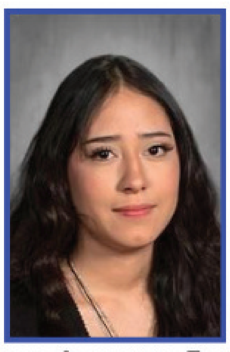
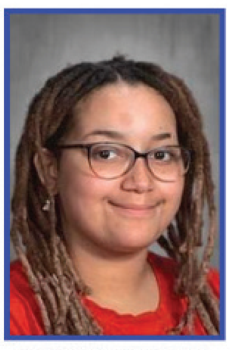
COVERT, MI. 49043

CLASS VALEDICTORIAN
Gonzalez, Camila

CLASS SALUTATORIAN
Castro, Elizabeth


Ayala-Alcauter, Erica


Barnes, Ceanna

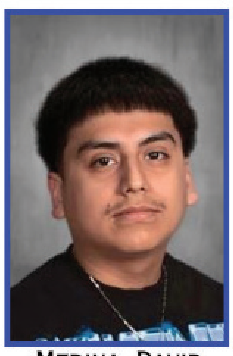
Cardenas Barragan, Jhony

Corona, Julytza

Gallegos-Soria, Yarely

Harris, Cornell

Hernandez, Jairo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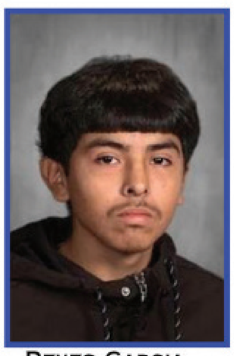
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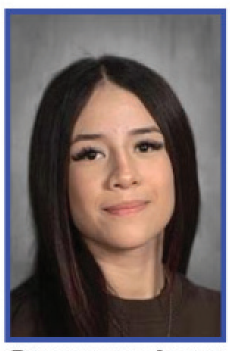
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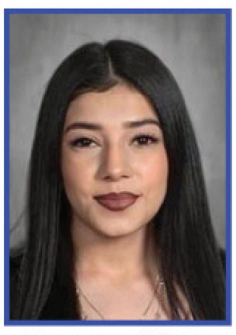
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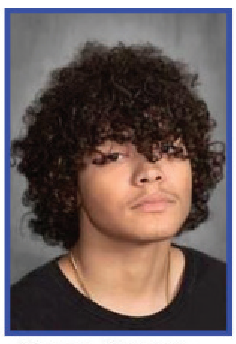
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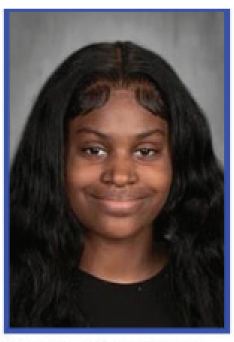
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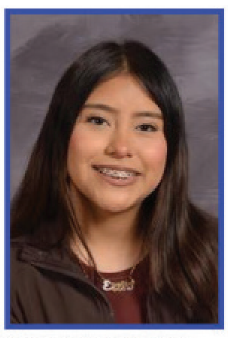
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Williams, James

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FOCUS

THE CONVERSATION

1776's Declaration of Independence inspired Washington's troops to fight against the odds – and also helped bring in powerful allies

By CHRISTOPHER MAGRA
University of Tennessee (The Conversation)

A crowd gathered along the waterfront in New York City in the summer of 1776. The scene they witnessed was terrifying.

The largest expeditionary force in British history sailed into the American harbor. Over 300 ships brought 32,000 professional soldiers and Hessian mercenaries to crush a rebellion.

Nearby, Gen. George Washington's army gathered to hear their commander read a document that would forever change the nature of their fight: the Declaration of Independence.

And contrary to how Americans now think of that document – as an inspiring declaration that detailed the grievances of Colonists against the British king and announced their independence from Great Britain – what Washington read to his army was also something else.

The Declaration of Independence was America's first formal declaration of war. It planted a symbolic flag for Patriots to rally around. It transformed illegitimate rebels without hope of foreign aid into state-sponsored freedom fighters eligible for military alliances.

This foundational American text wasn't just a philosophical breakup letter but a strategic move to secure vital support for the American war effort. America's first declaration of war was a high-stakes geopolitical gamble essential to achieving independence.

Converting rebels into soldiers

As I and other military historians show in our forthcoming collection of essays, "America's First War: The Military History of the Declaration of Independence," the declaration was written within the confines of 18th-century legal standards that strictly governed diplomacy and warfare.

Thomas Jefferson, the foremost writer of the declaration, relied heavily on the Swiss jurist Emer de Vattel's 1758 treatise "The Law of Nations." Vattel stressed the fact that in the eyes of European courts, providing aid to rebels was a violation of sovereignty and a dangerous precedent.

Vattel argued that for foreign powers to intervene legally in conflicts, the oppressed party had to formally declare its independence and assume the status of a state. Jefferson kept Vattel's treatise open while he was working on the Declaration of Independence to ensure he used the specific terminology required to transform the American rebellion into a just war.

By framing independence as "necessary," Jefferson was not just waxing philosophical. He was satisfying the legal requirement set out by Vattel that all peaceful avenues for reconciliation had been exhausted, which justified war to the "Powers of the Earth."

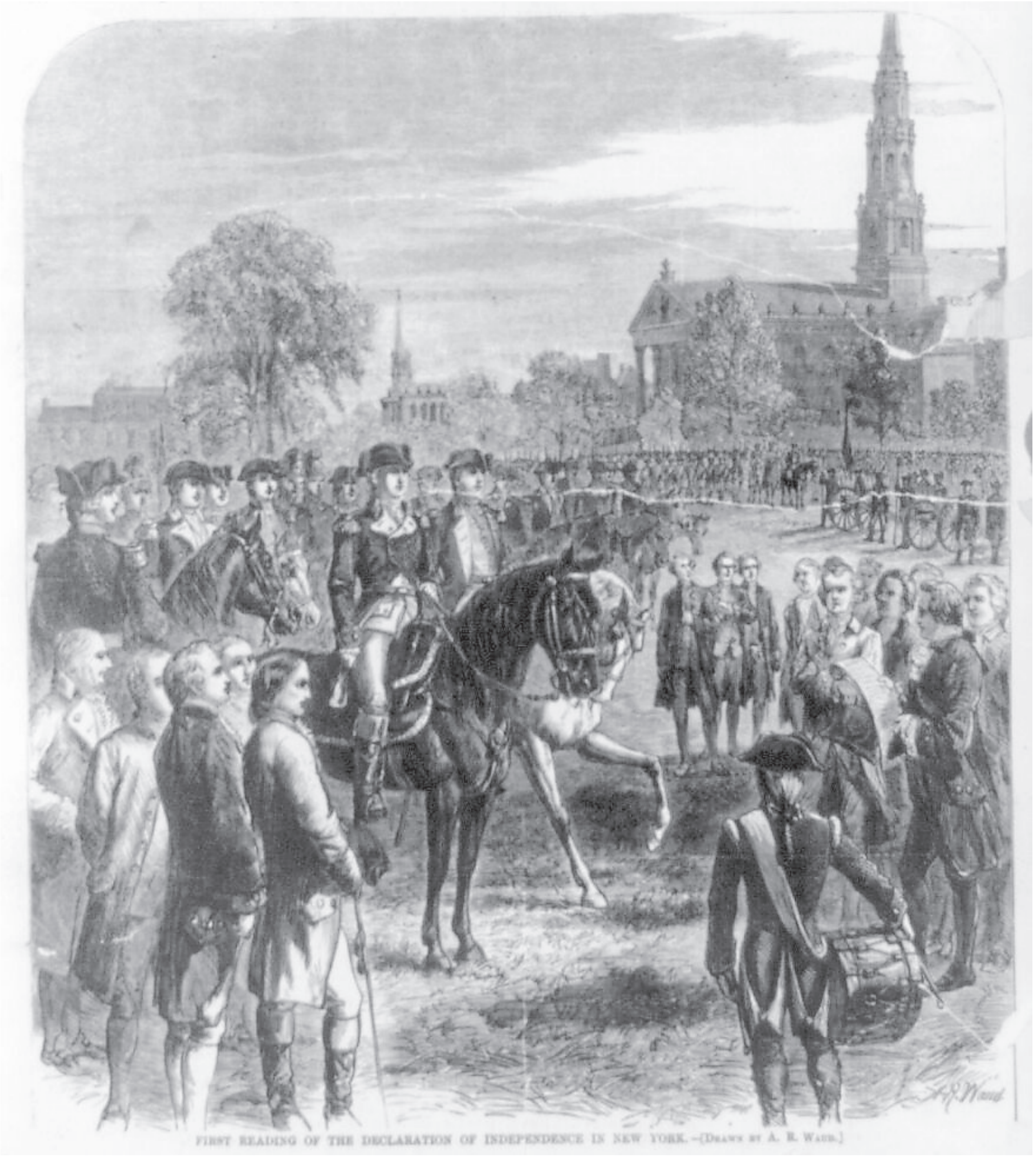
A formal declaration of war, approved by Congress, increased support for the American military here at home. It rallied a divided and wary population. Even as late as 1776, there were Americans who remained fence-sitters, uncertain about the risks of a total break with the British Empire.

The declaration functioned as a public rallying flag that allowed Americans to identify themselves as a legitimate, unified group. Like Thomas Paine's widely read pamphlet "Common Sense," the declaration educated the uncommitted on the inescapable necessity of breaking away from the British Empire:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident," the declaration reads, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.–That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, –That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

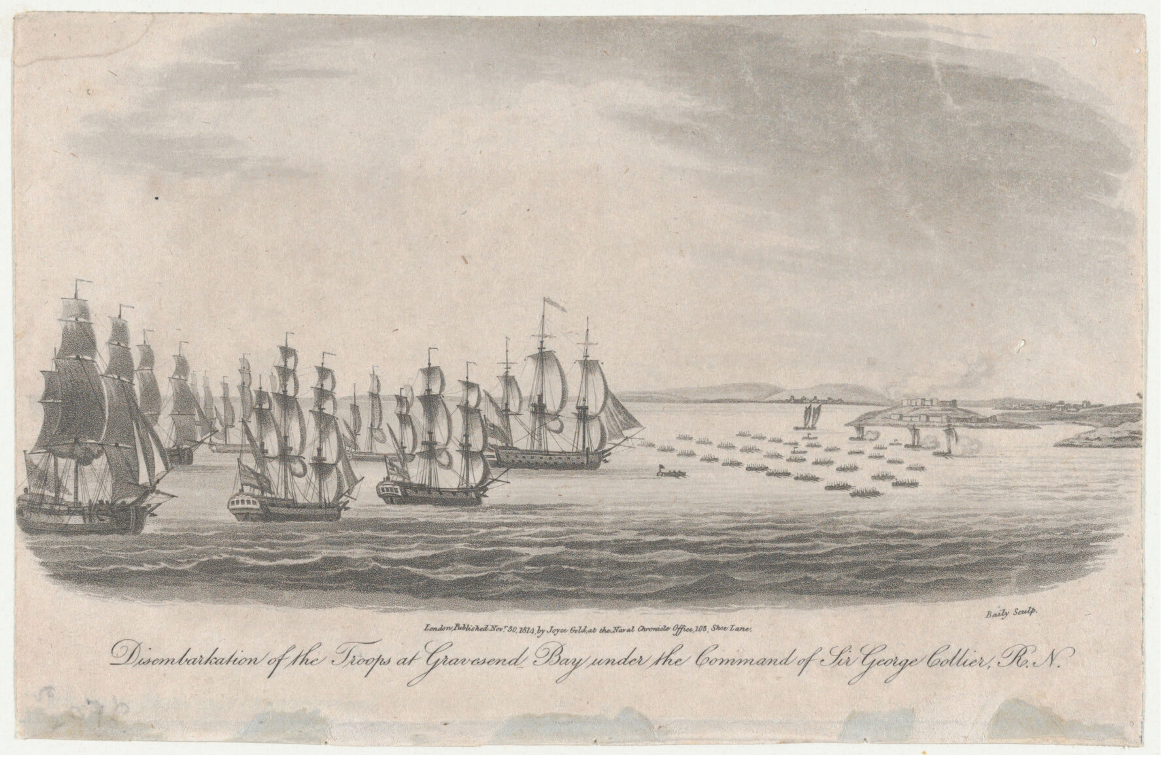
By framing the fight in the universal language of the preamble, Jefferson sought to inspire and unite disparate Americans through a shared vision of a better life.

In doing so, he helped transform localized resistance movements into a collective national mission. In the words of the declaration, "But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."



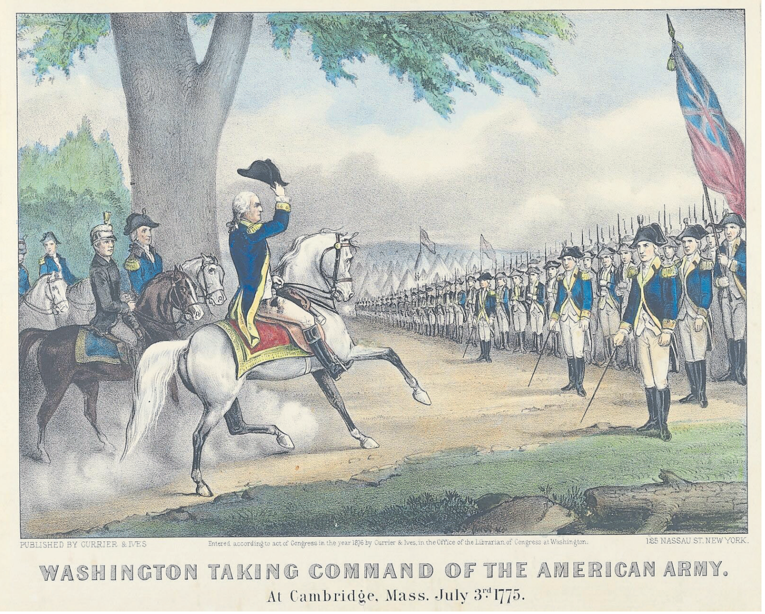
Library of Congress

This engraving by A.R. Waud from an 1870 issue of Harper's Weekly is captioned "First reading of the Declaration of Independence in New York."



The Metropolitan Museum of Art

This 1814 print by John Baily, published in London's Naval Chronicle, depicts the landing of British forces on Long Island on Aug. 22, 1776.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art

In this 1876 Currier & Ives print, George Washington salutes his troops.

The declaration and the American army

This psychological shift was especially critical for the rank-and-file soldiers in the Continental Army.

That's why, on July 9, 1776, Washington ordered the declaration to be read to his troops in New York. His aim: to provide a fresh incentive for the coming struggle.

This public address was intended to transform the nature of their service. They were no longer disloyal subjects in rebellion against a legitimate sovereign, but soldiers of a new nation defending their own homeland. Through Jefferson's words and Washington's address, the declaration fueled enthusiasm for a new political system and rededicated America's soldiers to a cause that was not yet won.

Washington told the troops he hoped "this important Event will serve as a fresh incentive to every officer, and soldier, to act with Fidelity and Courage, as knowing that now the peace and safety of his Country depends (under God) solely on the success of our arms."

America's first declaration of war bolstered troop morale at a pivotal point in the conflict. The Continental Army was going to square off against the largest expeditionary force in British history in the summer of 1776. And Washington's troops consisted of approximately 19,000 militiamen.

The British army had the British navy. Washington had only minimal naval support. The arrival of the first waves of Hessian mercenaries, auxiliaries for Britain, in July 1776 only deepened American resolve to seek out their own foreign military allies.

Forging alliances

The declaration helped bring about much-needed support for the American war effort among foreign governments.

The primary strategic target of the declaration was the Bourbon monarchies of France and Spain, Britain's chief rivals. The Continental Congress understood that the fledgling United States could not withstand British military might without receiving overseas shipments of gold and gunpowder, in addition to warships, sailors and soldiers.

Silas Deane, the Americans' first secret envoy, arrived in Paris in July 1776 with instructions to procure equipment for an army of 30,000 men and to inquire about a formal alliance once independence was declared.

Working with the French playwright Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Deane established the shell company Roderigue Hortalez and Co. to funnel secret aid from the French government to America. This clandestine supply chain eventually provided thousands of muskets, field artillery and millions of pounds of gunpowder that made possible the 1777 victory at Saratoga and France's subsequent formal alliance.

While France provided the bulk of the naval support, Spain's role was equally critical to the American war effort.

Following the declaration, the Continental Congress intensified its appeals to Spain. Bernardo de Gálvez, the governor of Spanish Louisiana, became a central figure in this secret war. Even before Spain formally entered the war in 1779, Gálvez channeled over $70,000 worth of medicine, weapons and uniforms up the Mississippi River to Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. This southern lifeline kept the American war effort viable in the Western theater and forced the British to maintain a defensive posture on multiple fronts.

Reframing the declaration as a strategic war measure highlights the Founding Fathers' sophisticated understanding of power.

They recognized that each individual's "unalienable rights" were a fantasy without the "full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, [and] contract Alliances." Jefferson and the members of Congress understood that American freedom required support for the war effort at home and abroad.

By transforming a localized insurrection into a state-sponsored homeland defense and an international conflict, the declaration ensured that the American Revolution would not be a mere sound of one hand clapping, but a successful geopolitical struggle that brought about independence.

Christopher Magra is a professor of American history at the University of Tennessee. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

FOCUS

Photos by Brian Cassella / Chicago Tribune / TNS

Artist Steve Shanabruch sits with some of his neighborhood prints at his Chicago home on March 9.

Visit Norwood Park! Or Englewood!

A Chicago artist creates and sells tourism posters for the city's neighborhoods

By NINA METZ
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

CHICAGO — If you've ever seen a poster from the 1930s promoting one of America's national parks, created at the behest of the Works Progress Administration, then you have a good idea of the kind of tourism-style posters the illustrator and graphic designer Steve Shanabruch has created for a number of Chicago neighborhoods and landmarks.

They are visually striking, with bold lines and vivid colors. The poster for Englewood features the sunny atrium of the yellow brick residential Yale Building. The poster for Norwood Park features the distinctive, colorful exterior of the Superdawg drive-in hot dog stand. His latest is a poster for Wicker Park featuring a Blue Line "L" train.

Shanabruch has no affiliation with any city agency. His impetus to draw these posters – which are available for sale on his website – is self-driven.

The project began 15 years ago with a simpler concept: Creating logos for Chicago neighborhoods.

"I hated my job," says Shanabruch. "I was a designer with a sales company and I just wasn't being challenged creatively. So it was just a personal project to fulfill my creative needs. I started the logos of neighborhoods and community areas in 2011."

Shanabruch is originally from Chicago. He grew up in Beverly.

"Chicago and Chicago history is ingrained in my blood. My father started the Chicago Bungalow Association for the city and ran it from its infancy. So the city's idiosyncrasies have always appealed to me. I think that's probably true for any designer or creative person."

He began by creating three logos a week.

"I used to wander a lot more before I had a child," he says of his inspirations. The logos were "based on personal experience with those neighborhoods" and imagery that felt representative.

The Humboldt Park logo features the Puerto Rican flag arch on Division Street. The Hyde Park logo features the stained glass from Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House. The Kenwood logo has an Art Deco graphic from the Powhatan Apartment building. The New City logo (an area that encompasses Back of the Yards) features a pig, referencing the neighborhood's history as the site of slaughterhouses. The logo for South Chicago features a car that looks like it's speeding up a ramp, which is a reference to "The Blues Brothers" movie when the Bluesmobile jumps the partially raised 95th Street Bridge.

Occasionally, Shanabruch says, people would reach out about using the logos. "I was actually just driving through Bowmanville and saw it on a banner and I was like, oh man, I forgot that I said they could do that!"

After a year or so, he burned out on logos. That is what led him to the next iteration of the project with neighborhood posters. He owns a copy of one of those old WPA National Parks posters, and looking at it one day, he thought: That could be fun if I focus on various Chicago neighborhoods.

"Just based on doing the logos, it became obvious that people have so much pride in their neighborhoods," he says. "And it's a nice way to feature neighborhoods that don't ever get featured. There's a lot of Chicago art out there, but so much of it is based on downtown or the lakefront or any of the hip neighborhoods. But somebody in North Lawndale? They're probably happy they live there and would appreciate seeing it represented on a poster. I've been selling these since 2012, so I know if a certain neighborhood poster is not going to sell. But I'll still do it because one, it's creatively fulfilling, and two, it's really important for people to be seen. Every neighborhood is important, even if it gets dumped on by the media. And I want to create art that celebrates the city."

These days, Shanabruch lives in Portage Park. And the Portage Theater is featured prominently in the posters. That feels intuitive. Some of the posters are more counterintuitive. Rogers Park, for example, features the Madonna Della Strada chapel on the campus of Loyola University.

"I'm not religious, I have no ties to Loyola. But I'm doing this mainly for creative fulfillment and I love Art Deco and wanted to draw that Art Deco church. But I've also learned that my posters featuring churches don't sell well."

What began as an informal side project now makes up half of Shanabruch's income. In addition to his website, his art is sold around town, including the Willis Tower Skydeck gift shop. He quit his job more than a year ago and now also works with clients on a freelance basis. When Preservation Chicago released its list of endangered sites last month, Shanabruch was hired to draw a poster featuring a column from the Chicago Stock Exchange trading room floor, currently housed at the Art Institute.

He estimates that he's done around 60 neighborhoods so far.

"I never plan it out. I do it on a whim," he says. "But I really want to do Irving Park, because I get a ton of requests for that. But usually it's because I'm driving through a neighborhood and I'll be like, 'Oh, man, I haven't been here in a long time,' and then I'll start to notice things and usually that inspires me. It's definitely serendipitous."

He then draws the posters on an iPad. Some years, he's released 10 or 11 prints. Sometimes it's just five or six, "depending on my workload and what's going on in my life."

Shanabruch has also added a third element to the project: Fonts based on signage around town. The newest is inspired by the iconic Pride Cleaners building in the Chatham neighborhood, which recently announced that it is closing. All the fonts can be downloaded for free.

"From neon signs to letters sculpted into a building's facade, Chicago has a long history of amazing signage," he says on his website. "So many of these signs have been lost over the years, but I have found a way to preserve what we still have and commemorate what we have lost through an ever-expanding roster of signage-inspired fonts."

He calls one of the fonts Comiskey and it's based on a photo of the ballpark stadium that he guesses is from the 1960s or '70s. The letters have spurs on them, giving the font an almost country-western look. "The White Sox were quirky back then." There's another called Tap Room, based on the signage of the Lincoln Tap Room in Lakeview.

"I'm not a trained typographer, but the first one I did was Starsiak, which was on the Starsiak Clothing building on Milwaukee and Division and I just wanted to recreate that. So I made all 26 letters and 10 numbers and punctuation and then made a font file. And I was like, well, that was a fun challenge. So I just started making them, and then people started sending me pictures saying, 'Hey, you should make a font of this one.' Some of them are iconic signs, some of them aren't."

He says he finds himself working on fonts when he's supposed to be focused on something else.

"I call it procrasti-working. I'm being productive, just not on the thing I'm supposed to be productive on."

The fonts are free to download.

"I don't care how people use them, as long as they're not using them for Trump ads or ICE stuff. I guess I can't control that, but that's my preference. I was in Edgewater Candles the other day and they gave me a shirt of theirs because it had one of my fonts on it. It was awesome. And then I saw someone used one of my fonts for album artwork and I thought, hey, that's cool. So it's fun to see – that's why I put them out there for free. The low self-esteem designer in me is like, nobody would pay for these, so I might as well just get them out there. I made them, so why not let people use them?"

By contrast, the prints on Shanabruch's website are not free. But the price – $28 per poster – isn't outlandish.

"That's the thing, I want the posters to be accessible," he says. "It's nice because some people will leave Chicago and they'll buy five or six of them to represent all the neighborhoods they've lived in so they can still have that memory.

"I mean, it's exciting any time anyone says they like my art. Obviously, people buy it, but it's still astounding to me that people like the stuff I make."

Artist Steve Shanabruch sorts some of his neighborhood prints March 9 at his Chicago home.

FOCUS

Photos by Richard Tsong-Taatarii / The Minnesota Star Tribune / TNS

Daniel Gonzales tattoos Israel Ray Gaitan at Stillwater's tattoo parlor while new apprentice Chris Brown looks on.

These prisoners are turning time into tattoos, *with a purpose*

By RACHEL HUTTON
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Daniel Gonzales pressed a tattoo needle into Israel Ray Gaitan's bare back, where a Mayan calendar spanned Gaitan's shoulder blades. Gonzales had already logged 30 hours tattooing the elaborate design in honor of Gaitan's mother.

Gonzales wasn't sure how Gaitan sat through the ordeal: Tattoos in the spinal area hurt a lot. "Don't let pain get you down and keep moving forward," Gaitan said of the strategy that has guided him through 33 years of incarceration.

This tattoo parlor resembles any other licensed by the state of Minnesota except for its location: Stillwater prison. Both Gaitan and Gonzales are convicted murderers serving time there.

Stillwater's two-year-old tattoo apprentice program is one of the first in U.S. prisons. The program offers a new rehabilitation option alongside the typical barbering and construction trades.

The idea behind it is twofold: Teach inmates job skills and reduce the spread of hepatitis C, which can be transmitted by unsanctioned, ad hoc tattooing in the cells.

Each year, the state Department of Corrections typically spends nearly $1 million on hepatitis C medications, prison administrators say. Training prisoners to do safe tattooing can reduce that expense, along with the cost to society when former inmates relapse into criminal behavior. Roughly half of released state prisoners return to prison within 5 years, and stable employment has been shown to reduce reoffending.

"This gives me a sense of purpose," said Gonzales, who was licensed through the program a year ago and has 16 years left on his sentence. "We're all going to be out there one day."

Tattooing in the cells

Incarcerated for the past decade, Gonzales learned to tattoo in the cells, a practice he described as "tattooing from scratch, using damn near anything that you can get your hands on."

He said inmates make their own tattoo guns from everyday objects, such as the barrel of a pen, the motor from a beard trimmer or a sharpened guitar string. Ink is made from soot.

Gonzales said infections are mostly warded off by wishful thinking, but he said he knew someone who once contracted an antibiotic-resistant staph infection.

Prisoners seek tattoos to differentiate and express themselves in an environment with little autonomy, Gonzales said. Everyone wears the same plain, Corrections Department-approved clothing in blue, white or gray.

"When you come into prison, you're really stripped of your identity," Gonzales said. "Getting tattooed is a bold statement to say, 'I'm an individual, I'm a person.'"

Corey Schuck graduated from Stillwater prison's tattoo apprentice program last year and is creating an intricate multi session tattoo for Shawn Vennemann. Since his release last fall, Shuck is one of the program's first two licensed tattoo artists to enter the industry in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, on March 9. He works at No Joke Tattoo Studio, owned by Chris Calvillo, who also did time at Stillwater 25 years ago and understands firsthand the importance of prisoner rehabilitation and supportive reentry.

The apprentice program

Justin Jimenez, a tattoo artist who has owned Electric Blue Tattoo Co. in Forest Lake since 2019, was hired by Stillwater to mentor and train prisoners in the program.

So far, four apprentices have graduated from the program. After two were recently released, two newcomers filled their spots. Jimenez teaches the apprentices about the history of tattoo styles and blood-borne pathogens, and demonstrates tattooing by raffling off free ink for prison staff.

The apprentices refine their drawing skills on paper before learning to use tattoo machines on fake skin. Then they practice on themselves and each other before offering their services to other prisoners.

The apprentices have already inked a few hundred clients, who must be discipline-free for six months, pay $25 a session and have their design approved.

Some images, such as those with anything gang-related, nudity or vulgarity, are forbidden. Jimenez said the designs that program clients receive aren't the crude inkings typical of prison tattoos.

The entire tattoo industry has become more professionalized, Jimenez said, as body ink has gone mainstream and shed its rough-and-tumble stigma.

"It's not all skulls and barbed wire anymore," he said. "We're doing tons of really fine art."

Prisoners have requested teapots, butterflies, flowers and hearts, as well as tributes to family members. Many of the tattoos have sentimental value, said Marina Fuhrman, a Corrections Department manager who works with the program.

Prisoners can also have old tattoos covered. One, for example, had a tiger's face inked over a swastika.

Fuhrman said the tattoo parlor has improved the prisoner-staff dynamic. "This shop created its own culture, which gives people a sense of humanity and normalcy," she said.

Added Jimenez: "It presented a common ground. Art is something that everyone from all walks of life can enjoy."

Reducing disease, giving hope

While some have balked at the tattoo program's $130,000 annual budget, which includes Jimenez's salary, the initiative can combat the spread of an expensive disease. The Corrections Department typically treats close to 100 cases of hepatitis C each year at a cost of $12,000 to $51,000 per inmate.

Though the number of hepatitis C patients has declined since the tattoo program launched, it's uncertain how much it has contributed to the improvement; the Corrections Department doesn't track cases acquired in prison.

But Fuhrman said violations for tattooing in Stillwater's cells have plummeted since the parlor opened, dropping from as many as eight to 10 infractions a month to hardly any.

She said the prison plans to continue the tattoo program until the facility's planned closure in 2029. It will then be transitioned to another facility and possibly expanded.

Stillwater tattoo artist Courtney Ocegueda, who is serving time for murder, said the program has given him hope of finding stability as he anticipates his release in 2033. He said many Stillwater prisoners are trying to leave their former ways behind – "being reckless and acting the fool" – and transform their lives for the better.

Newly enrolled tattoo artist Chris Brown shows off some of his drawings at the Minnesota Correctional Facility – Stillwater in Bayport, Minnesota, on Feb. 13.

"We're trying to take advantage of what's being given to us, so people can see we're not just throwaways," he said. "We all got somebody that cares about us, and we're trying to do better for them and for us."

On the outside

Chris Calvillo, owner of No Joke Tattoo Studios in White Bear Lake, was imprisoned at Stillwater in the early 2000s. He said that if the prison had offered the apprenticeship program then, he likely would have taken the path to his dream job a lot sooner, instead of returning to crime and incarceration.

Calvillo employs several tattoo artists who were once in prison. Among them is Corey Schuck, who was licensed at Stillwater and joined No Joke after transitioning to work release last fall.

Schuck was convicted of felony assault, and the contours of his crime resemble those of other tattoo-program participants: after being provoked or angered, quickly retaliating with a weapon.

Those impulsive, violent acts are a striking contrast to tattooing, a process Schuck described as painstaking, almost meditative.

"I don't think about my problems," he said. "I just think about pulling this line straight or shading this shade."

Schuck said the patience he cultivated while in prison and learning tattooing improved his ability to keep his emotions in check. "I've been calmer about things," he said. "My reaction isn't to quick-spit anger, like it used to be."

Calvillo calls tattooing "a form of teaching patience within yourself." He said he believes Schuck and other felons he employs aren't inclined to return to their former criminal behavior now that they've made something of themselves and have so much at stake.

"It gives you a sense of pride, of being somebody," Calvillo said of a career as a tattoo artist. "Those were decisions made when you didn't have all that."

FOCUS

Dania Maxwell / Los Angeles Times / TNS

From left to right, Activated, Coconut Cloud, Hailey Bieber's Strawberry Glaze, Pitaya and Turmeric Crush smoothies from Erewhon are pictured in June 2022 in Los Angeles.

Why Americans are buying $22 smoothies despite feeling terrible about the economy

By YUANYUAN (GINA) CUI
and PATRICK VAN ESCH
Coastal Carolina University (The Conversation)

Americans are skipping restaurant dinners, delaying car purchases and scouring for grocery deals. Amid tariff anxiety and broader stress over affordability, consumer confidence has dropped to levels not seen in over a decade, according to The Conference Board, a business think tank. At this point, it's wealthier consumers who are powering the bulk of spending in the U.S. economy.

So what explains the success of Erewhon's $22 smoothie?

The Los Angeles grocery chain selling these fancy concoctions is doing so well, it opened three new stores in 2025 – its biggest expansion since 2011. The chain reportedly generates $1,800 to $2,500 in sales per square foot, up to five times what a typical U.S. supermarket earns.

These aren't ordinary blended drinks; they include ingredients such as high-grade sea moss gel, adaptogenic mushrooms and collagen peptides. Often they come with a celebrity's name attached.

It's all part of the broader boom in the U.S. specialty food market, which has surpassed $219 billion – up nearly 150 percent in a decade, according to the Specialty Food Association. That far outpaces the roughly 47 percent growth seen in overall U.S. grocery sales over the same period.

Independent retail data from the market research firm Circana also confirms this growth: Even as inflation-weary consumers have traded down to store brands in many categories, premium and specialty products held up and even grew their dollar share of the market through 2025. On TikTok, creators who once filmed designer-bag hauls now post $12 tinned fish boards. Craft chocolate bars that cost $8–$12 are being marketed as, without irony, "self-care."

So if consumers are this anxious, why are they still splurging? In fact, these aren't contradictions – they're two expressions of the same psychological reaction.

When people feel life is out of control, they reach for something small, expensive and signaling virtue. This is the real reason premium food is booming while some traditional luxury brands struggle, say consumer psychologists.

We are professors of consumer behavior and marketing who study how people make purchasing decisions amid economic uncertainty, and ask what explains the gap between how consumers feel and how they actually spend. Our work points to a consistent finding: When people feel they've lost control over the big things, they seek it in the small ones.

Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times / TNS

Erewhon in Los Angeles' Studio City neighborhood. Catering to an upscale clientele, the high-end grocer has become a magnet for influencers and celebrities seeking natural foods and holistic remedies.

A quick detour through the makeup drawer

Economists have seen this before.

In 2001, Estée Lauder Chairman Leonard Lauder coined the term the "lipstick index" after he saw that lipstick sales rose 11 percent following the Sept. 11 attacks. When big luxuries feel out of reach, consumers find a small substitute. A $60 lipstick is extravagant for a cosmetic, but next to the Hermès handbag it psychologically replaces, it feels like a bargain.

Then, as now, people seek agency wherever they can find it. Consumer psychologists call this "compensatory consumption": buying things to feel in control when life feels out of control.

While even beauty sales are softening, that impulse hasn't disappeared. It has just found better hosts – such as food.

In many ways, food is an ideal product for this compensation. It's experiential – something you taste, smell and savor. It's also emotional – carrying associations with comfort, care and home. And it's visible, because if you're on social media, what you eat is now as public as what you wear. Premium food isn't just eaten – it's filmed, posted and performed.

Most importantly, it's still relatively accessible. Twenty-two dollars may be an absurd price for a drink, but it's cheap compared with a $400 wellness retreat.

Indulgence with a side of virtue

Here is what separates this moment from Lauder's lipstick index. That example was purely about pleasure, as consumers sought indulgence as consolation. Today's premium food purchases carry an additional layer: They are coded as virtuous.

An Erewhon smoothie isn't just a treat. It's organic, superfood-enriched and wellness-aligned. By the same logic, a $20 bottle of single-estate olive oil isn't just cooking fat; it's a commitment to craft and health. Premium tinned fish isn't convenience food; it's sustainably sourced protein caught in the wild with packaging beautiful enough to display.

This "virtue coding" does the most important psychological work in the sales transaction: It transforms indulgence into self-investment. You're not splurging during a downturn; you're doing something for your health. You're not being frivolous; you're supporting small producers. Research shows that people need reasons to justify pleasurable purchases, especially during financial anxiety – and premium food is powerful because the justification is built into the product. The organic label, the sustainability story, the wellness framing – they all dissolve guilt before it even kicks in.

Consumed in the kitchen and again on the feed

There's a reason this trend is accelerating now. Many premium food purchases are consumed twice – once physically and once digitally. The Erewhon smoothie purchase isn't really about the drink; it can be as much about the content as the drink. The tinned fish board is plated for Instagram before anyone takes a bite.

Social media doesn't just amplify the trend; it completes it. When you post a photo or video of the smoothie, you're broadcasting that you value wellness, quality and intentionality. In a cultural moment when flaunting a designer bag feels tone-deaf, food provides perfect cover. It's the safest flex there is. It's no surprise that one YouTube video of an Erewhon haul by food creator @KarissaEats has drawn over 14 million views.

All of this raises a fair question: Does the growing focus on the "K-shaped economy" explain this boom? As many economists see it, low- and middle-income shoppers are increasingly pulling back, as they face an affordability squeeze from health care to housing and education. But wealthier consumers are picking up the slack and then some, splurging on luxury and powering gross domestic product growth.

In this scenario, premium food thrives because it's still affordable for the people who are doing fine, even as everyone else cuts back. That's partly true. But this explanation doesn't account for another shift – why affluent consumers are foregoing splurges on items like designer handbags in favor of premium groceries.

This is why the virtue framing matters so much. If the question was purely about having money to spend, traditional luxury would be booming as well. It isn't. A case in point is LVMH, the conglomerate behind Louis Vuitton and Dior, which saw its fashion division's profits decline 13 percent across all of 2025.

Even consumers who are flush with disposable income need psychological permission to spend during anxious times. The premium food phenomenon is about why food has become the thing they choose – not about who can afford to splurge.

And when a smoothie becomes a status symbol, it tells us something about economic security more broadly. Food prices have climbed nearly 30 percent since 2019, outpacing 23 percent for overall consumer prices, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For a family stretching a tight grocery budget, $22 isn't a smoothie. It's dinner.

The need for control, the desire for identity, the comfort of virtue permission – these are universal. A single mother working two jobs feels the same craving for agency as the influencer filming her grocery haul. It's just that the purchases that satisfy those needs are increasingly constrained by price. The justification only works if you can afford your indulgence.

What's really in the cart

The next time you're in a grocery store and you reach for something a little more expensive than what you might need, you should pause – not to put it back, but to think about what you're actually reaching for.

Chances are it isn't really about the product. It's about the feeling of choosing something when the world feels out of hand.

A $22 smoothie is never just a smoothie. It's what people seek out when they need permission to feel OK.

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FOCUS

This new art and retail district aims to 'make Fort Lauderdale cool again'

The Thrive Art District, an arts and commercial hub in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., that caters to young professionals, is now open.

Photos by Carl Juste / Miami Herald / TNS

Brothers Jonathan, left, and Abraham Fish, who developed the Thrive Art District in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

By AMANDA ROSA
Miami Herald (TNS)

> **"When you take an area that's blighted, where nothing is really happening, and you activate it with arts and culture, it's a magnet. It creates an energy. It just makes people want to be there."**
>
> **STEVEN GLASSMAN**
> Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner

A vintage store next to a matcha cafe next to a romance bookstore across the street from a brewery next to a pilates studio. Crisp white walls decorated in murals you'd expect to find in Wynwood. A shiny skyline in the distance.

For the trend-seeking 20-something-year-olds of Fort Lauderdale, Thrive Art District, a commerce and arts hub near downtown, may be their new oasis.

"We say in private a lot, 'We need to make Fort Lauderdale cool again,'" said Taymir Terrell, 28, who founded Alma Matcha with friend Jessica Binder, 29, and opened their Thrive location last October. Despite rainy March weather outside, the inside of their matcha cafe was buzzing with dozens of customers happily sipping on light green lattes.

"Miami's got their thing going," Binder said. "Fort Lauderdale has got room for growth, so we want to be a part of that."

What was once two city blocks of dingy industrial warehouses is now an alluring complex of stores, cafes, artist studios and event space meant to attract Fort Lauderdale's burgeoning population of young professionals and South Floridians willing to drive from Miami and West Palm Beach.

After celebrating Thrive Art District's ribbon-cutting ceremony in March, brothers Jonathan and Abraham Fish, Thrive's co-founders and developers, said the idea was to bring something different to Fort Lauderdale.

"It has to be big enough to really change an area, to do something that's really going to make a difference," Jonathan Fish added. "Fort Lauderdale is just perfect because there's such a need for a destination like this over here."

Thrive Art District, about 80,000 square feet of mixed-use space in the Progresso Village area, certainly aims to fill a niche. Tucked in between the historic Sistrunk neighborhood, the still under-construction FAT Village development and Flagler Village, a neighborhood popular with young people and families, Thrive is meant to cater to downtown Fort Lauderdale's evolving demographics.

Fort Lauderdale, as Mayor Dean Trantalis boasted during his State of the City address last year, is in the midst of an economic "renaissance." The post-pandemic years have been defined by a real estate boom, population surge and increase in jobs, especially in and around the downtown area. Unlike other major cities, downtown Fort Lauderdale has seen an 83 percent increase in families with children since 2018, according to data from the Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority.

The city government and Community Redevelopment Agency worked closely with the Fish brothers on the project, providing nearly $4 million to go toward fixing infrastructure within the Thrive complex.

"I've never seen money better spent than what you were able to create here," Trantalis said at the March 4 ribbon-cutting ceremony.

From 'gross' warehouses to an outdoor gallery

It started with a car ride around town. Years before the pandemic, the Fish brothers were driving around Fort Lauderdale looking for a gem. They found it in on Fifth Street and Eighth Avenue, where there was a 60-foot-wide right of way.

"It just has so much opportunity," Jonathan said.

The brothers, who used to work in the insurance industry, then started approaching owners to purchase the warehouses in 2016, eventually acquiring about 10 buildings. When they presented the idea for the art district to the Fort Lauderdale City Commission, "they thought we were dreaming," Jonathan said.

"Now we're heroes," Abraham quipped.

City Commissioner Steven Glassman, who represents the area Thrive is located, recalled when the Fish brothers invited him tour the site six years ago, back when it was "really gross."

"I looked at them and said, 'Really?'" Glassman said. "It was such a blighted area. I mean, it was just one rag shop after another, greasy, dirty, derelict. I just couldn't believe what they were telling me their vision was, but I love people with vision."

The brothers' vision and passion for the idea is what got Glassman on board. He worked closely with the Fish brothers, who invested about $20 million in the project, to get Thrive to the finish line. The brothers said the city allowed them exceptions to certain city codes regarding setbacks in order to build the district as they intended.

"Thanks to Commissioner Steve Glassman who was a tremendous help in pushing this. The entire city, they really were able to work with us," Abraham said. "You can't build this today, even if with all the money in the world. They were able to help us be grandfathered in."

Construction started in 2021. Businesses and artists started moving into the district in 2024. To date, Thrive is home to about 35 businesses and art studios for about a dozen artists, where monthly rent starts at $600 for a small studio.

Incorporating art into the development was central to the Fish brothers' vision, they said. Their father was an art dealer who raised his sons around art. But while their father was focused on the old masters, the brothers are more interested in street art and how it evolved from taboo to respected.

"We always felt that art is something that really unifies and creates something special. When you create a district, it's very important that there's a theme. What's unique about the destination?" Abraham said. "Ours, I would say, is the best way of going about it. [Street art] was what's going to connect all the businesses together and give it the vibe that when you walk around, you feel part of something."

The Fish brothers say Thrive is home to, probably, "the largest outdoor gallery in the world." They started by inviting mural artists they were fans of to view the space and create a unique piece of art. Soon, other artists from South Florida and around the world reached out, they said.

The artists were given one unique parameter: Allow for there to be a border of white around the mural to act as a "frame." Because of that, each mural pops against the white background, attracting the attention it deserves as a work of art.

"When you take an area that's blighted, where nothing is really happening, and you activate it with arts and culture, it's a magnet," Glassman said. "It creates an energy. It just makes people want to be there."

Booming businesses

When Sotiria Sourlis came to Thrive for an Art Walk event, she immediately fell in love – with a storefront.

She wasn't alone, Abraham said. A couple of people wanted the space for themselves, but Sourlis and her restaurant Greek Sugar got the prize. "She fought for it," he said.

"I love the brightness of this particular store. I love that it faces the music square where all the events are. High ceilings, my neighbors, all the art outside, all the culture in the neighborhood," Sourlis said. "I love my view when I stand here and I see the tremendous mural in front of me. We're happy to be a part of the Thrive community."

While Greek Sugar has only been open for about a month, the restaurant already has repeat customers, she said. One fellow Greek woman drove from Davie for a taste of home.

"It truly makes my soul so warm that they go out of their way to try my food," Sourlis said.

Artist Chris Dyer, who sells custom glass artworks, had a similar love-at-first-sight story with Thrive.

"I drove past the neighborhood and I was like, 'Let me do a sales pitch,'" he recalled.

He contacted the Fish brothers immediately and moved in last year.

"I believe Thrive is going to be the next big thing when it comes to Wynwood," Dyer said.

The demand for space at Thrive, either for storefronts, studios or event scheduling, is high, the Fish brothers said. Thrive regularly hosts events including art fests, car shows, music performances, yoga classes and other wellness-related events that are popular among younger people.

"One of the things we're getting right now is a lot of requests to do events over here," Jonathan said. "That's another thing that we are kind of surprised at, how fast that's taking place. But we kind of knew it, because Fort Lauderdale needed a place like this."

The brothers are also in talks with cruise lines about bringing tourists to Thrive for excursions when they hop off the ships in Fort Lauderdale. Tourists can come do a tour of the art district, learn how to spray paint a mural or make their own custom bag charms at leather shop Atomic Freedom. "It's going to become a big tourist destination," Jonathan said.

As small business owners and Broward natives, Binder and Terrell said Thrive's rapid growth has been exciting to see. The art district, which is primarily occupied by local businesses, is exactly where they want Alma Matcha to grow, they said.

"I just imagine this place full of people outside, reading a book, drinking matcha, enjoying the sun," Binder said of the district.

The business partners believe in Thrive so much, they opened the cafe last year as a temporary location to encourage their loyal customers to check out the area. In the meantime, Alma Match's flagship store has been under construction next door, and will open this spring.

Though they could have opened a cafe anywhere, Miami or New York City, Binder and Terrell said there's no place like home.

"This is what we want for us and for our our future kids and our neighbors and our sisters and brothers. It's not to say we won't eventually do Miami and New York and all these other major places," Terrell said. "But that doesn't feed the soul."

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Maddison Haruch, right, prepares a matcha for a customer at Alma Matcha's temporary location as the buildout for its permanent store is underway at the Thrive Art District in Florida.

Alma Matcha co-owner Taymir Terrell, 28, takes a moment at her business new location at the Thrive Art District in Florida.

A group of San Diego spring breakers spends some time at Alma Matcha in Florida.

FOCUS

Chicago family sells home after 116 years

'This house has known us, kept us, and loved us'

By GREGORY ROYAL PRATT
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

Photos by Eileen T. Meslar / Chicago Tribune / TNS

Five of the six Sorich siblings, Steve Sorich, clockwise from top left, Sandra Brown, Kris Sorich, Patti Parker and Sue Sabo, sit on the front porch of the Bridgeport, Illinois home where they grew up on March 9. The home has been in their family for over 100 years.

On March 8, Stephanie Sorich holds up her sleeve to show her tattoo of the Bridgeport home that has been in their family for over 100 years.

CHICAGO – When Joseph Slajchert first bought a workers cottage at 29th and Emerald, the automobile was on its way to replace the horse and buggy.

But it wasn't quite there yet.

The year was 1910. A black-and-white photo from around that time in Bridgeport shows five children wearing their Sunday best on the front steps, the boys in dapper caps.

Generations of the Slajchert family stayed in the home for another 116 years, through two World Wars, global pandemics, an endless series of tragic fashion trends, the rise of the Internet and the onset of self-driving cars.

Now the family is saying goodbye and selling the property after the home's last matriarch, Antoinette "Toni" Sorich, died last summer. She was 91.

It's a natural next step for the family and the home, but for the family's descendants, it's bittersweet. Antoinette Sorich and her husband, Stanley, raised six children in the five-bedroom workers cottage. The parents slept in the living room. From their kids, 15 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild grew to know its walls.

"I know it's just a building and home is where your mom is and she's not here anymore, but it's pretty special," daughter Patti Sorich Parker said recently from the family kitchen. "It's pretty special to have what we had for all those years, many, many years, and we're very, very lucky."

The family has spent the past few months working through the sale and processing memories. Antoinette's granddaughter, Stephanie Sorich, who has a tattoo of the home on her arm, wrote an essay about the home that she read at Antoinette's funeral, saying the "house on Emerald Avenue is saturated with the lives and history of my family."

"I can feel it when I walk in the front door: the house knows me, as it knew to expect me some twenty-seven years ago from conversations about cribs or due dates over coffee in the little kitchen," Sorich wrote. "Like the glue carefully applied to the old wallpaper my grandfather put up in the living room, or the hinges on the oak cabinets that house the Pyrex plates I could draw from memory, we have seeped into the bones of the house."

"Over one hundred years this house has known us, kept us, and loved us," she added.

It's hard to know how many Chicago families have owned their homes as long as the Sorich clan. Citywide, more than 60 percent of all single-family homes have been sold at least once since 2000, according to the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University.

Bridgeport has long been a multiethnic community and a haven for multigenerational families and their businesses. The neighborhood dates back to the 1830s, when white settlers began building small homes along the South Branch of the Chicago River. Irish immigrants helped build the Illinois & Michigan Canal linking Chicago and the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River. It was named for a low bridge on the river. Five mayors, including both Daleys, called the neighborhood home.

The White Sox have been there since at least 1910. Schaller's Pump, a legendary Bridgeport tavern previously believed to be the city's longest-running bar, closed in 2017 after operating for 136 years.

Bridgeport Ald. Nicole Lee, 11th, said the neighborhood has social organizations and churches that tie the community together.

"It speaks to the strength of the community's ability to support one another," she said.

Cook County Commissioner John Daley said it's normal for families to stay and it's normal for them to eventually move. He has personal experience with that. His father, Richard J. Daley, was the city's mayor from 1955 to 1976. He built a bungalow in the 1930s and raised seven children there. John is the last one left in the neighborhood.

"I'm one of seven. Six family members with my brothers and sisters have decided on their own to move on," John Daley said. "That's a personal decision. The community is as strong as ever."

Of Antoinette and Stanley's grown children, Kris Sorich is the last one who still lives in Bridgeport.

"People like this neighborhood for what it has to offer because it is a family neighborhood," she said.

The Sorich family is Italian-Croatian. In addition to raising their own, the home was also a way station for newly arriving Croatians. Their phone number was shared in the Croatian community and Stanley's father, Božo Sorich, would take calls from people looking for a place to stay.

Long after Božo died in 1977, the phone would ring with people asking for him, family said.

The Sorich family's recent history in the home on Emerald Avenue dates to roughly 1961, although the details are a little murky.

Before moving into the house, the family lived in a nearby apartment on Parnell that burned down. Not long after, Antoinette moved into the family home on Emerald. The building on Emerald, which was constructed in 1885, was already old, first-born Mary Lynne Shaw recalled.

"The kitchen cabinets were all metal," Shaw said. "It hadn't been remodeled in a long time."

Antoinette's husband, Stanley "Stash" Sorich, was a tradesman who worked for the city as a painter. Family lore says he painted Richard J. Daley's office green.

At home, the walls were originally plaster and he redid them with drywall for his wife, although Shaw recalled it was a bone of contention because he took his time painting it. "H e had such a big family he'd take side jobs on the weekends," she recalled. "He didn't have time."

After moving into the home, the family kept growing. Antoinette and Stanley raised Mary Lynne, Patti, Sue, Sandi, Kris, and Steve. That made for a tight space.

One photo of the kitchen shows 13 people hanging around a small table. The family shared a small poem about "Antoinette's Kitchen" that includes the lines:

"We're at the kitchen table and it's crowded as hell / And every single person's got a story to tell / Everyone is talking – Will anyone listen? / How I love all the voices in Antoinette's kitchen!"

At times, it could be a little overwhelming. Kris said she remembers coming home from school to find her mother sitting in the recliner, smoking a cigarette.

"Just like the calm before the storm," she said.

Stanley would arrive from work at 4:30 p.m., throw the little kids over his shoulder, and take them inside. At 5 p.m., the children were all expected to be home for dinner. He would use a bell to call them in.

The family had a backyard swimming pool and would invite the neighborhood to hang out. Stanley would jump off the roof into the water, a spectacle his children remember.

"That was a showstopper," Kris said.

For a time, Sorich cousins rented an apartment next door and would hang out the side windows playing with Barbies. Their parents would fill the washing machine in the kitchen with ice and use it as a beer cooler.

Aunt Agnes lived in the basement at one point. On Sunday afternoons after church, they'd go down to the basement and she would play Alvin and the Chipmunks singing Beatles hits as she made kiddy cocktails and sprayed perfume. She would have a highball.

Sue Sorich Sabo remembers sitting on the front porch with her future husband, Mike, and his cousin. Dad came out and blasted them with a fire extinguisher. He was protective of his girls.

Mary Lynne remembers laying out her clothes on the bed and taking a shower before heading out for a neighborhood dance. When she got out, the clothes were gone. One of her sisters had taken them for the party.

Stanley Sorich died in 2012. He was 81. Some things changed in the coming years. The children would take turns coming over and staying with Antoinette. After Stanley's death, she didn't much like having everyone over at once. She preferred to spread them out.

During COVID, one of the daughters said she must be bored because the world closed down. Antoinette looked up from her iPad and said, "I'm not bored."

The home's prospective buyer, Carlos Loyo-Albino, is 23. The house was around 117 years old when he was born – nearly the same amount of time the family lived in it. Loyo-Albino grew up in McHenry County and is studying at UIC. He told the Tribune he likes the nearby park.

Carlos told the Tribune he looks forward to living in the home and potentially raising a family.

"1885 is crazy. That's like owning a piece of history," he said. "I think it's important to preserve that history."

Sitting in the kitchen weeks before the sale, with four of his sisters at his side, Steve Sorich said he wishes the next generation at the home well.

"I just hope that whoever buys the house that they feel our spirit," he said. "There's a lot of love here."

The Bridgeport, Illinois home at 2935 S. Emerald on Monday, March 9, 2026, that has been in the Sorich family for over 100 years.

HEALTH

Dreamstime / TNS

'How low can you go?'

The shifting guidelines for blood pressure control

By PAULA SPAN
KFF Health News (TNS)

The patient initially came to see Mark Supiano in 2017 because her family was concerned about her short-term memory loss.

While taking her history and vital signs, Supiano, a geriatrician at the University of Utah, saw one disturbing signal: Her blood pressure was 148/86, above normal despite her taking two medications intended to lower it. "Clearly that was too high," he said recently.

Several factors could have contributed to the high reading, including the anti-inflammatory drug the 78-year-old woman took for arthritis pain, a high-sodium diet, and a lack of regular exercise. She had also told Supiano that she typically drank a couple of glasses of wine each evening.

After Supiano discussed ways to lower her risk, the woman and her husband joined a gym. She stopped taking the anti-inflammatory and cut back on salt and alcohol, bringing her systolic blood pressure readings into the 130-to-140 range – still hypertension, according to the guidelines issued by the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology later that year, but more acceptable. (Systolic is the top number in the blood pressure ratio and the more clinically important number.)

By 2019, though, the patient had a diagnosis of mild cognitive impairment, and medical evidence was emerging about a connection between hypertension (the medical term for high blood pressure) and dementia. "I was not as aggressive as I should have been," Supiano recalled. He added a third drug for high blood pressure to the woman's regimen, and her readings fell to 120 or lower.

The shifting guidelines for blood pressure control may remind those at advanced ages of a dance fad from their youth, the limbo. As Chubby Checker once intoned, "How low can you go?"

For more than 25 years, a reading of 140/90 or below was considered normal, according to the AHA/ACC guidelines. But the 2017 update introduced major changes, backed by results from the landmark SPRINT trial, which enrolled adults over 50 who were at high cardiovascular risk.

The SPRINT trial found that intensive treatment aimed at bringing the systolic number below 120 reduced the risk of heart attacks, strokes, other cardiovascular illnesses, and overall mortality so substantially that the investigators stopped the study early.

It was unethical, they decided, to deny half the trial participants the benefits of intensive treatment. The 2017 guidelines, therefore, recommended medication for those with a systolic blood pressure over 130.

The most recent revisions, issued last year, encourage still tighter control. They call for patients at cardiovascular risk to strive for systolic readings below 120, and they also call that target "reasonable" even for those who are not at high risk. Readings considered normal not so long ago are now defined as hypertension.

Blood pressure normally rises with age because "with stiffening of the arteries, the heart has to pump harder," said Erica Spatz, the director of the preventive cardiovascular health program at the Yale School of Medicine. From 2021 to 2023, about two-thirds of adults over 65 had hypertension, according to the operative definition at the time.

But recent revisions could "define a lot more people as having high blood pressure," said Rita Redberg, a cardiologist at the University of California-San Francisco.

To Supiano, recent studies in the United States and in China that show cognitive benefit for the lower readings "have tipped the scales" for older adults. "What's good for the heart is good for the brain," he said, calling those findings "a lever to get people to pay more attention to their blood pressure. They may not want to live longer, but they want to hold on to their cognition longer."

Nearly all major medical associations, including the American Geriatrics Society (Supiano is the chair of the organization's board), have endorsed the latest guidelines.

"I used to be lenient in many of my older patients," said John Dodson, a cardiologist and researcher at NYU Langone Health. "If I overtreated high blood pressure, bad things were going to happen."

Blood pressure that drops too low – hypotension – can cause dizziness and fainting or injuries from falls.

Now, Dodson said, "I'm treating my older patients more aggressively." Studies have shown that treating high blood pressure benefits even frail older adults. And while older adults in the SPRINT trial had more fall injuries, the rate wasn't higher in those receiving intensive treatment than in those undergoing standard treatment. Among those over 75, it was about 5% for both groups.

Another significant change: The new guidelines recommend at-home monitoring.

"Blood pressure is tricky," Spatz pointed out. "It varies throughout the day, depending on whether a person is just waking up or just ate or it's hot outside." Systolic readings can bounce around by 30 points or more in a single day.

And they're almost always higher in a doctor's office. "I don't want to put much stock in one reading," Spatz said.

"Maybe the patient has white-coat syndrome," she added, referring to anxiety about doctors and testing, "or they had a fight with the parking attendant" on the way in.

She asks patients to record their blood pressure twice a day for a week or two before their appointments. Some doctors prescribe a 24-hour home monitor.

Will patients adopt home monitoring and more aggressive treatment? Cardiologists argue that high blood pressure, almost always asymptomatic, remains undertreated despite the newer guidelines.

Price is not likely to present an obstacle. Most patients need two or three drugs to lower blood pressure, but as generics they're "dirt cheap, about $5 a month," and rarely interact with the other drugs that are often prescribed for older people, Supiano said. A blood pressure monitor for home use runs $35, or more for those that digitally transmit data.

Although some side effects are serious – a fall can be life-altering – most complications "thankfully are transient and reversible and rather mild," he said.

Yet the guidelines have skeptics, too. Redberg, for example, counsels older patients about diet, exercise, and weight loss but does not urge them to start medication to reduce a 135 systolic reading to below 120.

They already seem overanxious about their blood pressure, she said, adding, "I encourage them to go out and enjoy themselves."

"Take a class! Go to a museum!" she said. "You can't do that if you're at home taking your blood pressure five times a day."

While trials and guidelines address benefits for the population as a whole – even small reductions in dementia would have an enormous impact – they are not useful for predicting individual outcomes. The PREVENT calculator, used to gauge whether someone would see cardiovascular benefit from hypertension treatment, has not been validated for people over 79 and does not factor in cognitive benefits, Supiano noted.

For people with other serious illnesses – cancer patients or frail nursing home residents with dementia, for instance – controlling blood pressure may be far down the list of concerns.

Time is also a factor in weighing risks versus benefits. A meta-analysis of older patients by Sei Lee, a geriatrician at UCSF, and colleagues found that for 200 patients in intensive treatment for hypertension, it would take 1.7 years to prevent a single stroke.

Reducing very high blood pressure is simpler and more important than trying to lower a 130 reading to below 120, Lee added. "You'd have to work a lot harder, add a third or fourth medication, and the risk of side effects is higher."

Supiano's 78-year-old patient did hit that target and did well for six or seven years. Then, as happens with many patients with mild cognitive impairment, she began to decline and eventually received an Alzheimer's diagnosis.

Given what researchers are reporting about the cognitive benefits of treating high blood pressure, "maybe it gave her another couple of good years," he mused. "Maybe it delayed the progression." Or maybe, he added, he should have started intensive treatment earlier.

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MAYO CLINIC MINUTE

Arne9001 / Dreamstime / TNS

Physical therapist-recommended golf exercises

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

As golf season approaches, preparation should start before your first tee time. Building strength off the course can improve performance and help reduce injury risk.

"Play the long game by building strength off the course," says John Zajac, D.P.T., a physical therapist certified in golf-specific rehabilitation at Mayo Clinic Sports Medicine. "By adding resistance exercises to your golf routine, you can support your joints, improve balance and build stability."

Resistance training

Resistance training is essential for golfers. It strengthens muscles, ligaments and tendons while improving core stability, mobility and functional strength. These benefits can translate into better swing control, more consistent contact and improved endurance throughout 18 holes. Just as important, targeted strength work helps protect the lower back, shoulders and wrists – areas commonly affected by golf-related injuries.

Golf exercises to consider

Zajac recommends focusing on three key areas:

■ **Rotator cuff and shoulder** (rows/scapular strengthening): Strengthening the upper back and shoulder stabilizers supports posture and helps control the club throughout the swing.

■ **Core** (plank and side plank): A strong core improves rotational stability and balance, allowing for more efficient power transfer while reducing strain on the spine.

■ **Glutes and legs** (bridge exercises): Golf is played on one leg at a time. Building lower-body strength and balance enhances stability during the swing and helps generate power from the ground up.

Perform these exercises on non-golf days two to three times per week. A consistent strength routine can help you stay steady, swing with confidence and avoid a season-ending bogey.

ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

Parenting after trauma: Understanding your child's needs

By ANDREW GARNER, MD, PHD, FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

Dreamstime / TNS

All children need to feel safe, understood and valued. This is especially true for children who have experienced trauma. Early, hurtful experiences can cause children to see the world differently and to react in seemingly unpredictable ways.

Children who have been adopted, have been placed into foster care, or have experienced significant adversities may need extra help to cope with what has happened to them in the past. They may also need trusted, predictable and caring adults to teach them more adaptive ways to have their needs met moving forward. Knowing what experts say about early trauma can help you understand your child's behavior and support your child's development.

An event is traumatic when it threatens the child or someone the child depends on for safety and care. Trauma may be due to abuse, but trauma may also be due to other events such as neglect, separation, violence between caregivers, natural disasters and accidents.

A frightened child may feel helpless in the face of a world that appears unpredictable or out of control. When this happens, the body's protective reflexes set off a "fight or flight" panic response that can make a child's heart pound, raise their blood pressure, and lead to emotional outbursts or aggressive behavior. When attuned and invested adults can help the frightened child feel safe, understood, and valued, these protective reflexes and panic responses are brief. But in the absence of such attuned and invested adults, these panic responses can be sustained and lead to long-term changes in the way the child's genes interact, the way the child's brain develops and functions, and the way the child understands and interacts with others.

Some children are more sensitive to adverse experiences than others. What is traumatic for one child may not be traumatic for another. It may be harder to detect trauma in children who have been neglected, because they often don't show signs of physical injury like bruises. These children may worry about having their basic needs met, like food, safety or connection. Even worse, neglect may have robbed them of the attuned and invested adults needed to turn off those panic responses.

Because they may see some adults as untrustworthy, mistreated children often resist help from all adults. Some may withdraw from people and seem shy and fearful. But others may be very friendly with everyone they meet, crossing personal boundaries and putting themselves at risk for more abuse. They may feel forced to choose between "trust no one" and "trust everybody, but not really."

Trauma has more severe effects when it happens repeatedly, with multiple stresses stacked upon one another. Younger children as well as those with fewer social supports or coping skills can also be more severely impacted by trauma.

From the child's perspective, traumas are experienced as a pattern of sensations, with images, sounds, smells, thoughts and feelings all mixed. Traumas can also "remembered" the same way, rushing into the present without a child even realizing they are experiencing a memory. These remembered – often overwhelming – patterns of sensation associated with past trauma are called "triggers."

Triggers can be smells, sounds, places, postures or tones of voice. Even emotions can be a trigger. For example, being anxious about school may be related to being anxious about violence at home. This can cause dramatic and unexpected behaviors like physical aggression or withdrawal. Triggers can be hard to identify, even for a child. If a child knows what a trigger is, the child will often try hard to avoid it.

Remembering a traumatic event can cause some of the original fight-or-flight reactions to return. This might look like a " tantrum " or overreaction. Sometimes anxiety can cause a child to "freeze" or blankly stare as if they are in their own world. This may look like defiance or "zoning out." A child who sees the world as a place full of danger may do this. Many children who have been abused or neglected go through life always on edge and have difficulty maintaining control of their emotions because their body is always ready to freeze, flee or fight in self-defense.

Being ready to flee or fight shows up in many ways. Children who are always on guard may have trouble concentrating, a symptom called "hypervigilance." These effects of past trauma can be easily confused with hyperactivity and inattention, classic signs of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and children may incorrectly receive this diagnosis if caregivers and doctors do not realize the effects of trauma on development.

Children who have experienced trauma may also be overwhelmed with emotions and have trouble with the unexpected. Their need for predictability and control may be seen as "manipulative" or as always wanting things done their way. Not trusting adults can be mistaken as a disrespect for authority and can cause problems at home and school. It can also make learning harder.

Going from one activity to another may be hard as well for children living with trauma. When these aggressive responses are extreme and trauma reactions are not considered, it can be labeled "oppositional defiant disorder" or "intermittent explosive disorder." These terms do not recognize that a child's reactions might have been appropriate at the time they experienced a trauma, even though they may be no longer appropriate now.

Children who have been adopted or are in foster care have often suffered trauma. They may see and respond to threats that others do not, and their brains may always be "on guard." Many children who come from the foster care system have never learned to depend on consistent, reliable adults, so typical parenting practices may not work. It can be hard to remember that these strong emotional reactions may be directed at you, but they are not about you. Stay calm and remind yourself that these behaviors aren't meant to be personal attacks. These strong feelings are in response to the traumas that happened in the past. Your child is just processing these overwhelming emotions in the only way they know how.

That doesn't mean you can't have a loving, healthy relationship with an adopted or traumatized child, but it does mean increased care and attention might be needed to get there. Some tips parents of adopted or traumatized children can consider include noticing and avoiding unnecessary triggers for the child, keeping them on a steady, predictable routine, allowing them a sense of control through simple choices, and avoiding discipline that includes physical punishment. It's important to allow your child to feel their feelings. Teach your child words to describe their feelings when they are calm, words they can use when they get upset. Show acceptable ways for them to deal with feelings. Then, praise them for expressing their feelings or calming down.

It's important to allow your child to feel their feelings, but that may require you to be OK even when your child is not OK. This models the "distress tolerance" that we want all children to develop. If children learn that they are not supposed to feel a certain way, they may try to avoid big feelings. But avoiding big feelings is the essence of anxiety. Instead of avoiding those big feelings – and all of their potential triggers – teach your child how to cope with them. Begin by using some words to describe their feelings when they are calm, words they can try to use when they get upset. Then note the activities that bring them joy, be it books, LEGOs, drawing, singing, dancing, sports or puzzles. If a child has a passion, you can teach how to handle big emotions by reminding your child to engage in those joy-filled activities when they are feeling overwhelmed. Finally, note and praise steps in the right direction, by saying "thank you for using your words, and good job on using that book to calm down."

Helping children to heal and grow after trauma begins with trust. When attuned and invested adults help children to feel safe, understood and valued, they are building the trust that is needed to learn more adaptive ways to handle big feelings

Children are remarkably resilient and do the best they can with what they have been given. It is our job to provide them with the tools they need and to guide them as they grow. It may be a slow process with many setbacks, but the rewards are worth the effort. By understanding that your child's past experiences impact the way they see and respond to their world, you have taken the first steps to building a safer, healthier world for your child.

Andrew Garner, MD, PhD, FAAP, is a Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Dr. Garner has practiced primary care pediatrics with the University Hospitals of Cleveland for more than 25 years.

Study: Once-daily pill could help teens with common genetic heart disease

By KAYLA YUP
The Philadelphia Inquirer (TNS)

PHILADELPHIA — A once-daily pill could change how doctors treat teens with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a genetic heart condition that can block blood flow, a Philadelphia researcher has found.

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia cardiologist Joseph Rossano led an international trial involving 44 patients ages 12 to 17 that studied a drug already approved for adults with the condition. His work showed the drug, mavacamten, could also significantly reduce blockages in youth – and possibly delay the need for surgery.

The trial's findings were to be presented at the American College of Cardiology's annual scientific session in New Orleans and simultaneously published in The New England Journal of Medicine.

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is a common inherited heart disease, estimated to affect one in 500 Americans. The average age at diagnosis is around 39, and most patients with the disease are undiagnosed.

The condition causes the heart muscle to thicken, which can obstruct blood flow. In such cases, the heart is strained as it works harder to pump blood out to the body. Over time, the condition can lead to heart failure, abnormal heart rhythms, and in rare cases, sudden cardiac death.

"This can present at any age, and sometimes the first symptoms could be the last symptom," Rossano said.

Mavacamten has been approved for adults with the condition since 2022, but hadn't yet been tested in adolescents or children. (The drug's manufacturer, Princeton, New Jersey-headquartered Bristol Myers Squibb, financially supported the study and pays Rossano as a consultant.)

In hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, the heart tends to squeeze extra hard and vigorously. By getting the heart to squeeze less strongly, obstructions to blood flow can be reduced. The medication is designed to treat the "underlying problem," rather than just the symptoms, Rossano said.

Teens in the trial were randomly split into two groups: roughly half received mavacamten, and the others were placed in a control group taking a placebo (no active drug). Participants did not know whether they received the intervention or not, a study design that's considered the gold standard for medical research.

They were followed for 28 weeks. The researchers compared the amount of obstruction before and after, evaluating levels of pressure in an area of the heart where healthy levels would be around 0 mmHg and above 30 mmHg would indicate an obstruction.

Kts / Dreamstime / TNS

The mean levels before treatment in both groups were around 80 mmHg. By the end of the trial period, the teens receiving mavacamten saw these levels cut substantially with an average drop of 48 mmHg, compared to 0.5 mmHg in the group receiving no drug.

"Nothing else can do that besides surgery," said Elizabeth Blume, a pediatric cardiologist and professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School who was not involved with the study or the pharmaceutical company.

Some of the children would have needed a myectomy, a surgery where doctors remove muscle that's blocking blood flow, she said. It's the primary treatment for young patients with severe obstruction, when medication fails to relieve symptoms.

But the effects of the drug were significant enough that they might not need surgery, at least for the time being.

"Imagine being the parent of a 12-year-old who can now take a medicine by mouth rather than have open heart surgery," said Blume, who also leads the advanced cardiac therapies division at Boston Children's Hospital.

Next step: Longer-term studies

The results suggest that surgery could be delayed for most of the kids, CHOP's Rossano said, although he wasn't sure whether it could be avoided altogether (that will require a longer-term study).

He saw the potential to reduce damage to the heart over time as especially exciting.

His team found that the heart was able to relax better on the drug. The heart also becomes less thick. And when the researchers looked at markers of injury in the heart, they found those in the mavacamten group showed decreased levels. Those in the placebo group had slightly increased levels.

These early findings suggested to Rossano that the drug might improve the way patients' hearts function in the long-term.

If these effects are confirmed in a longer-term trial, doctors may want to start patients on the drug at an early age to avoid heart damage that could otherwise accumulate over time.

"If we identify patients young with this and get started on medicines early, their hearts could be much better, 10, 20, 30 years later than if they weren't started on the medicine," he said.

He noted a limitation of the trial was its relatively small sample size. Longer-term studies are being planned.

The incidence of adverse events was similar for the two study groups, with two patients in each having a serious event.

In the mavacamten group, one teen experienced two fainting episodes, while another had an inappropriate shock delivered by an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD).

"None of those would stop me from using the medication," said Blume, the independent Harvard expert.

Blume called the rate of serious adverse events low for a group of sick pediatric patients. To her, there didn't appear to be any "surprises" compared to the adult trial.

Mavacamten has an FDA-required warning on its box for risk of heart failure. This rare but serious risk of the drug requires regular monitoring through echocardiograms.

Going forward, Blume also wanted to see long-term outcomes, since the study period of 28 weeks is a "very short time," she said.

The potential effects of puberty, for example, should be monitored in follow-ups of multiyear outcomes. She would also want to see a study in younger children to see if they could benefit as well.

Blume applauded the investment of time and resources needed to figure out if there are differences in dosing and side effects for children compared to adults, describing it as a "rarity."

"It's really a huge milestone for pediatric cardiomyopathy," she said.

FINANCE

How much are credit card points and miles worth?

By BRENDAN DYER
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Not only are there dozens of airline, hotel and credit card rewards programs, but each one comes with its own rewards currency, transfer partners and other redemption quirks.
Dreamstime / TNS

Whether you're new to travel rewards or have been scoring free trips for years, the world of points and miles can be confusing. Not only are there dozens of airline, hotel and credit card rewards programs to sort through, but each one comes with its own rewards currency, transfer partners and other redemption quirks.

Add to this that not all points and miles carry the same value. That means that 50,000 points from one program could end up being more valuable than 100,000 points from another program. With so many variables at play, how can you determine your points to miles value and how to best use the points you have?

What do points valuations mean?

The value of airline and hotel rewards vary dramatically between rewards programs and booking details, ranging in value from roughly 0.4 cents per point or mile to 3 cents per point or mile. This can make it tough to judge how far your rewards will take you when planning a trip.

Many general travel credit cards earn rewards that can be redeemed at one value for travel with the issuer, usually 1.0 cent per point, or transferred to an airline or hotel program and redeemed at another (potentially higher) value.

How to calculate rewards values

To see how much value you can get out of your rewards on an individual flight or hotel stay, divide the cost of a booking in cash by its cost in points or miles.

For example, a flight that costs $139 or 21,500 points will offer about 0.6 cents per point in value ($139 / 21,500 points = ~$0.006). If the same flight costs $250, you'd get about 1.2 cents per point in value ($250 / 21,500 points = ~$0.012).

Keep in mind that the value you can get out of your rewards will depend not only on the program but also the details of your booking. Some airline and hotel rewards carry a better point value than others on average, but your experience may vary based on when and where you travel, as well as whether you opt for a luxury or budget fare class or hotel tier.

A credit card with a high rewards rate or sign-up bonus may seem impressive, but be sure to consider the value of the rewards you'll earn. For example, you might earn 6X points on a room reservation using a hotel card and only 3X points with a general-purpose travel card, but the latter rate may offer more value since many hotel points are worth less than 1 cent each on average.

Credit card rewards vs. airline and hotel rewards

Credit card issuer rewards programs – like Chase Ultimate Rewards or Amex Membership Rewards – typically offer more dependable value than points and miles tied to a specific airline or hotel program. These programs also stand out for their unmatched flexibility.

Although airline and hotel rewards programs may provide higher rewards rates with loyalty status, you can only redeem those rewards with that program and its partners. Instead of being stuck redeeming your rewards with a certain airline or hotel (and taking whatever value you can get), the best general travel rewards cards give you the flexibility to move your points/miles between programs to find the one that offers the best value. You can redeem rewards through the issuer's travel portal or transfer to an airline or hotel program if that gets you more value for your rewards.

Plus, with many credit card rewards programs, you may not have to redeem for travel at all. Many issuer programs let you redeem rewards for cash back, gift cards, merchandise and even purchases through Amazon.com or PayPal. That said, to maximize the value of your credit card rewards, you'll most likely want to redeem for travel through the issuer or leverage the card's top transfer partners.

Bankrate insight

If you're having trouble finding the best rewards card for you, try Bankrate's spender type tool, which can recommend cards that fit your credit level and spending habits. You can compare these cards side by side using our credit card comparison tool or try CardMatch to see if you can prequalify for a card or get an exclusive welcome offer.

Current rewards value trends

Some rewards programs are starting to look a bit less lucrative.

For example, Southwest Airlines recently reduced its program rewards rate on Wanna Get Away fares, dropped the first two free checked bags for all flyers and changed Rapid Rewards point redemptions to a variable value in March 2025. That same month, Air Canada introduced variable Aeroplan rewards pricing.

Perhaps most notably, Chase has made major changes to point redemption values on the Chase Sapphire Preferred Card and Chase Sapphire Reserve. Where these cards have typically offered a higher redemption value when you use points to book via Chase Travel, they now only offer 1 cent per point in redemption value by default. To get a higher value, you'll have to find a Points Boost offer for your booking, which is by no means guaranteed.

Add other headwinds like proposed credit card legislation and diminished consumer protections – including the uncertain fate of a U.S. Department of Transportation airline rewards probe and the continued gutting of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), which has historically protected users from anti-consumer reward devaluations – and the future of point values is up in the air.

Even so, Bankrate's 2025 Chasing Credit Card Rewards survey shows there's still a high demand for rewards cards.

Our advice? Keep an eye out for dynamic pricing and crunch the numbers before you redeem to make sure you're getting a solid value from your hard-earned rewards. And if you're concerned about airline or hotel rewards being devalued, consider a more flexible, general-purpose rewards card that allows you to transfer points to different airlines and hotels or redeem for cash back at a decent value.

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Guide to first-time homebuyer grants

By DAVID McMILLIN
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Roman Samborskyi / Dreamstime / TNS

Coming up with a down payment on a home – especially if it's your first – can feel impossible.

But you don't have to do it by yourself: There are many first-time homebuyer grants that can help. These programs are offered by banks and nonprofit organizations, as well as state and local governments.

What is a first-time homebuyer grant?

Funds from a first-time homebuyer grant can help you cover a down payment on a home, as well as closing costs. And because the money is a grant, you don't have to pay it back.

First-time homebuyer grants differ from other types of down payment assistance that require you to repay the funds or meet certain requirements to have the funds forgiven. They also differ from affordable mortgage programs that come with perks like a lower mortgage rate or lower mortgage insurance premiums.

How to qualify

First-time homeowner grants tend to be geared toward low- to moderate-income borrowers. Generally speaking, households that earn 80 percent or less of their area median income (AMI) qualify as "low-income," and households that earn more than 80 percent and up to 100 percent of the AMI qualify as "moderate income." Fannie Mae has an AMI lookup tool to find yours.

Beyond income limits, most grant programs share a few common requirements, including:

- **Home price limits:** These limits vary based on your state or local housing market.
- **Borrower contribution:** Buyers must typically chip in some cash – often either 1 percent of the purchase price or $1,000, whichever is greater.
- **Residency status:** Most grant programs require the home you're buying to be your primary residence, not a rental or a second home.
- **Homebuyer education:** Many grant programs require you to complete a homebuyer education course before receiving the funds.

8 first-time homebuyer grants to consider

1. National Homebuyers Fund: The nonprofit National Homebuyers Fund sponsors down payment and closing cost grants for the purchase or refinance of a primary residence that can total up to 5 percent of your home's purchase price. You don't have to be a first-time homebuyer to qualify, but you do need to find a mortgage lender that participates in the program and forgives the funding. You can call the organization at 866-643-4968 for help finding local lenders.

2. Bank of America grant programs: Bank of America offers two grant options to help homebuyers in certain areas with a down payment and closing costs: the America's Home Grant and Down Payment Grant programs, both of which are available in select markets throughout the U.S. The America's Home Grant provides up to $7,500 in lender credits for closing costs, while the Down Payment Grant provides up to $10,000 in down payment help. You'll have to get your mortgage from Bank of America, however, and the Down Payment Grant could be counted as taxable income.

3. Chase Homebuyer Grant: The Chase Homebuyer Grant is available to homebuyers in select areas of the U.S. The program provides grants of up to $5,000 that apply first toward buying down your interest rate, then toward lender fees, and then toward a down payment. You can qualify for the Homebuyer Grant with Chase's DreaMaker loan, or a conventional, FHA or VA mortgage.

4. Wells Fargo grant programs: Wells Fargo offers two types of assistance grants to eligible buyers in certain areas: down payment help through the Homebuyer Access grant and the Dream. Plan. Home. credit for closing costs. The former provides up to $10,000 for low- to moderate-income borrowers, and the latter provides up to $5,000 to low-income borrowers. As with other grants offered by banks and lenders, you'll need to get your mortgage from Wells Fargo to qualify. You can check your eligibility on the Wells Fargo website.

5. HomeReady and Home Possible credits: If you're getting a HomeReady or Home Possible conventional loan, you might qualify for a $2,500 credit if your income is 50 percent or less of your area's median income. At least one borrower must be a first-time homebuyer. The credit is available for eligible loans through Feb. 28, 2027, and can be used toward your down payment or closing costs.

6. State and local first-time homebuyer grants: Many states and cities offer grant programs for first-time homebuyers. Check with your state's housing finance authority or real estate agent for more.

A local mortgage lender might also be able to point you toward free money.

7. Good Neighbor Next Door program: Available to law enforcement officers, teachers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians, the Good Neighbor Next Door program is overseen by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and offers a 50 percent discount on homes in designated revitalization areas. There is a three-year residency requirement to receive the discount.

8. HomePath: HomePath comes courtesy of Fannie Mae. Through this program, you can buy a Fannie Mae-owned property, often foreclosures that might need significant work. If you buy using an HFA Preferred loan – issued through your state's housing finance agency – you can qualify for up to 3 percent of the home value in closing cost assistance.

Other assistance for first-time homebuyers

If you can't find grants for first-time homebuyers that work for you, you aren't out of luck just yet. There are other low-cost first-time homebuyer loans and programs. You might also qualify for a forgivable loan, which could end up functioning much like a grant. That is, if you meet certain requirements, you never have to repay the loan.

Here are a few options to explore:

- **DPA second mortgages:** Down payment assistance (DPA) second mortgages are available through many state housing finance agencies. In a DPA second mortgage program, you'll apply for a 30-year mortgage to finance the home and then another, smaller mortgage to help with the down payment or closing costs. Just like the first mortgage, this second loan comes with an interest rate – although it might be lower than the first – and you repay the balance over time.
- **DPA deferred-payment loans:** Instead of requiring you to immediately start paying back the down payment assistance funds, some programs allow you to defer these payments until you sell your home, refinance or pay off your mortgage. The assistance won't accrue interest in the meantime, so the amount you owe won't grow.
- **DPA forgivable loans:** Forgivable loans are the closest cousin to homebuying grants because you may not need to pay the money back, provided you live in the home long enough. For example, you might be able to borrow $5,000 toward a down payment, and the loan balance is reduced every month over 10 years. If you stay in the home for 10 years, it'll be completely forgiven. If you move within the 10 years, you'll need to pay back a portion of the money.
- **Individual Development Accounts (IDAs):** IDAs are matched savings accounts typically designed for low-income individuals. IDAs are offered through some public housing organizations and private nonprofits and usually provide a dollar-for-dollar match, up to a specific amount, for savings goals, such as a down payment and closing costs.

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FOOD

Break out the air fryer for a chicken sandwich with a soy, garlic glaze

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

There's nothing like a fried chicken sandwich to put a giant smile on a sandwich lover's face.

Whether it's tucked between two pieces of white bread or stuffed into a toasted and buttered bun, the combination of crispy, craggy coating and juicy, tender breast or thigh meat is a pinnacle of handheld eating – at once both incredibly comforting and immensely satisfying. Calories be damned!

I used to think no one did a chicken sandwich better than Chick-fil-A. Then I discovered this recipe from Donaldo Estevam, aka "Donaldo Cooks," a digital food creator and air-fryer expert known for his easy, big-flavored recipes geared to the home cook.

Like a lot of food writers, I own just about every kitchen gadget. Most days, my air-fryer is gathering dust in my pantry; as a Mediterranean diet acolyte, I fry and saute a lot of foods in olive oil completely guilt-free.

Donaldo's recipe made me think I should give the countertop appliance another chance to impress, not to save calories, but because the Asian-inspired, soy sauce-based glaze sounded (and looked) so good.

The thick, glossy coating is a perfect mix of sweet (honey), spicy (red pepper and fresh ginger), tang (vinegar) and umami (fish sauce). One taste on your fingertip and you'll develop a craving for the stuff, which I'm guessing would also add a fantastic flavor to just about any protein or roasted vegetable and could be used as a dipping sauce for dumplings.

For the best-tasting sandwich, be sure to line both sides of the bun with mayonnaise, and don't forget a crunchy, cool layer of thick-cut pickles. A buttery brioche bun is the best way to hold it all together, but if you can't find the soft and fluffy buns at your local grocery store, a hoagie roll works just fine, too.

Air-Fried Chicken Sandwiches with Soy Glaze

Makes 4 sandwiches

I used boneless, skinless chicken thighs for these crispy air-fried sandwiches because they tend to be juicier and more forgiving if you cook them a minute or two too long. The original recipe calls for serving the cucumber salad on the side, but I tucked it under the bun for one big, flavorful bite. Spicy bread-and-butter pickle chips add just the right amount of kick.

If you don't have an air fryer, the chicken can be pan-fried in 1 or 2 tablespoons of oil until golden brown and crispy, about 6-8 minutes per side.

FOR CHICKEN:
4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts or thighs
1 cup all-purpose flour
2 large eggs, beaten in bowl
2 cups crushed cornflakes
Avocado oil spray
For seasoning:
1 tablespoon paprika
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1 tablespoon onion powder
2 teaspoons black pepper
2 teaspoons salt

FOR GLAZE:
1/2 cup dark soy sauce
1/3 cup honey
1 1/2 tablespoons sesame oil
1 tablespoon fish sauce
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon fresh ginger, grated
1/2-1 teaspoon crushed red pepper, or to taste
1/4-1/2 cup water, to control consistency

FOR SANDWICH:
4 brioche or ciabatta buns, toasted
Garlic mayo or Greek yogurt, for garnish
Sweet pickles, optional
For cucumber salad
2 English cucumbers, julienned
2 medium carrots, julienned
3 green onions, thinly sliced
Zest of 1 lemon

FOR DRESSING:
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
2 tablespoons rice vinegar
1 1/2 tablespoons avocado oil
1 tablespoon honey
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Prepare the chicken: Pat chicken dry and lightly season with salt. Coat each piece in flour, then dip in beaten eggs. Press firmly into crushed cornflakes and shake to remove excess. Spray both sides generously with avocado oil.

Preheat air fryer to 390 degrees. When hot, add chicken to tray and air fry until internal temperature reaches 165 degrees, 14-15 minutes.

Cook until internal temperature reaches 165 degrees, then allow to rest for 5 minutes before glazing.

While chicken is cooking, make glaze and stir together vegetable salad.

Add dark soy sauce, honey, sesame oil, fish sauce, garlic, ginger, crushed red pepper and water to a saucepan. Bring to a medium simmer and cook, uncovered, for 10-14 minutes, stirring often. (The glaze will naturally reduce and thicken from the honey.)

Once the sauce is glossy and coats the back of a spoon, remove from heat. Add cucumber, julienne carrots, green onions and lemon zest to a bowl. Whisk lemon juice, rice vinegar, avocado oil, honey, salt and pepper in a measuring cup, then pour dressing over vegetables and toss well. Chill 10-15 minutes before serving for best texture and flavor.

When chicken is done cooking, build the sandwich: Toss the chicken in the glaze. Toast buns until lightly golden and spread mayonnaise or Greek yogurt on both sides.

Add a layer of shredded lettuce, glazed chicken, pickles and vegetable salad. Top with bun and serve immediately.

donaldocooks.com

An air-fried chicken sandwich glazed with a glossy sauce made from honey, dark soy and garlic, and topped with cucumber salad.
Gretchen McKay / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette / TNS

National Geographic cookbook features National Parks-inspired recipes

By JOHN METCALFE
The Mercury News (TNS)

What do America's national parks taste like?

In Northern California, perhaps it's the earthiness of forest mushrooms and sweetness of crab meat. Along the Southern border, maybe the basso of pine nuts and tang of cactus paddles. And in the East, how about … a whole lot of country ham?

That delicious thought came up while Nina Elder and Melissa Knific were researching their 2026 book, the " National Geographic National Parks Cookbook: Dishes Inspired by America's Great Outdoors " (National Geographic, $32.50).

"I found this little tidbit that Shenandoah (National Park) is part of something called the 'Ham Belt,' which I had never heard of before," Knific says. "It's a strip of latitude around the globe that has the perfect conditions for curing a ham – parts of Spain fall into that area. That was really fun, and I feel like it's now a party fact I can reveal to anyone."

Knific and Elder are food writers and recipe developers who have split time among Bon Appetit, Parade and Rachael Ray's In Season magazine. About two years ago, they started to design a cookbook inspired by all 63 national parks in the U.S. – the flora and fauna endemic to the regions, as well as each's unique history and culture.

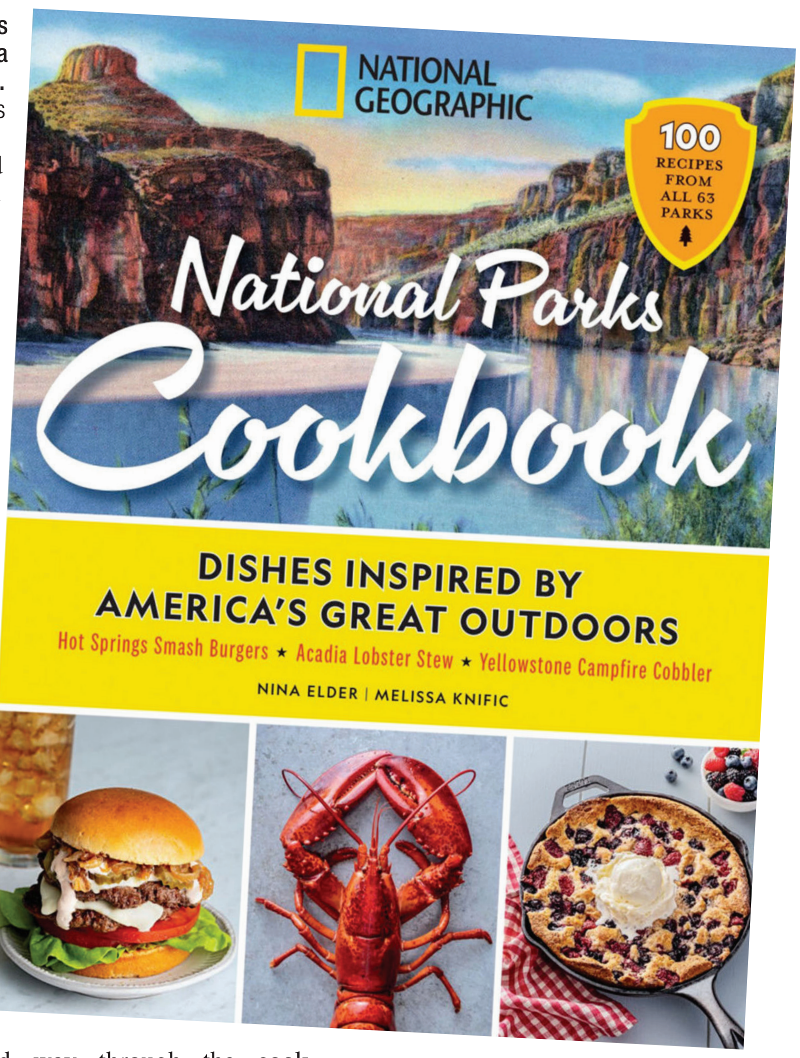
The result is a love letter to America's protected wilderness that should make readers part hungry, part rarin' to explore.

There's trout almondine with rice pilaf from California's Sequoia National Park – golden trout live in those high-elevation lakes and streams – and cast-iron rib eyes from Lassen Volcanic National Park, which has a history of cattle ranching. The Grand Canyon contributes blue-corn pancakes with pine nut-honey butter, and Wyoming's Grand Teton a Signal Mountain wild-game chili.

Up in Alaska, Denali is honored with pork tenderloin with lingonberry gastrique and spruce-top shortbread cookies. From over in Florida's Dry Tortugas, there's four-marlins salad with Key West pink shrimp and Key lime-coconut bars.

Ideas for recipes flowed from the local ecosystems of national parks – in the book, you'll find lots of berries and game meat like caribou and bison – as well as Indigenous cultures and old-timey inns and restaurants. Back in the day, it was fairly common to have a big eatery catering to visitors inside a park, such as one serving "gourmet fare" in Yosemite in the early 1900s.

"We'd dig into the flora or the fauna at a park, and would look around the area for lodges," says Elder. "We would look at towns near the park and see what people were enjoying – people were loving a milkshake at this place or a sandwich at this other spot, or they loved getting to-go items from a particular place to take hiking."



"National Geographic National Parks Cookbook," by Nina Elder and Melissa Knific.
Disney Publishing Group / TNS

There are some sandwiches and energy-rich treats to stuff in a backpack, and a few things that can be prepared in an RV or over an open flame. But sleeping bags and mosquito repellent are not required, at all, to enjoy the book.

"We didn't want it to be a book that just focuses on camp cooking," explains Knific. "We wanted to make this something that people could use in their home kitchen. You know, it's a taste memory, right? If they have been to a particular park and want to cook something from it, they can do every one of these recipes in their own kitchen."

In that way it's almost like astral traveling to a park you've always been fascinated by, experiencing its sensuous delights in the comfort of your abode. Here, Knific and Elder have shared four recipes inspired specifically by the national parks of California: a Spinach Salad With Prickly Pear Vinaigrette inspired by Death Valley; Dungeness Crab Cakes and Wild Mushroom Pasta inspired by Redwood National and State Parks; and slow-cooked Beef Barbacoa Flautas inspired by Pinnacles National Park.

The authors hope people keep these special places in mind, while they're sauteing and saucing their way through the cookbook.

"I had some appreciation for national parks before I started this project," Elder says. "But certainly after digging in on this level – the breadth and depth and history of these spaces – I really felt the importance to our country to protect and preserve them. To be able to celebrate them was a real honor."

A couple sat together during a matinee showing at the Riverview Theater in Minneapolis.
Anthony Souffle / The Minnesota Star Tribune / TNS

Gen Z is putting down phones and returning to movie theaters

By CHRIS HEWITT, ABBY SLIVA
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

MINNEAPOLIS — Conventional wisdom is that members of Gen Z are on their phones 24-7. But once or twice a week, Abraham Teuber can't wait to put his down.

That's when Teuber – who, at 25, is near the upper end of the 14-29 age range of Gen Z – goes to the movies. And the Minneapolis resident is in good company. Hollywood executives worried that his demographic permanently shifted to streaming content during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead, Zers are leading moviegoers back into theaters.

"This is an audience we thought would be lost to the small screen and to social media and other technology. We thought that they may shun the very analog experience of watching a movie on the big screen," said Paul Dergarabedian, a box office analyst for several decades with the media company Comscore.

Instead, Gen Z is buying up a higher percentage of movie tickets, rising from 34 percent of the overall box office in 2019 to 39 percent last year, Dergarabedian said. Like Teuber, most of the Zers, aka Zoomers, are turning off their phones for the duration of the film – and, possibly, turning them back on afterward to post reviews on apps such as Instagram or Letterboxd.

That's exactly what happened last year with "A Minecraft Movie." Despite poor reviews, it became a billion-dollar hit, in part because its "chicken jockey" scene went viral on social media, becoming something you had to see in theaters to be in on.

"What's driving a lot of this, ironically, is social media. A medium that is very small screen-centric and digital is becoming a huge influence in powering this age group to going out," said Dergarabedian. "They are going to theaters to have a tactical, immersive, communal experience."

Andy Windels, manager at the Main Cinema in Minneapolis, says crowds there back that up. Windels has noticed that older moviegoers seem more reluctant to return to theaters, but frequent sold-out showings in recent months represent a "big improvement" year-to-year.

"People were getting sick of going between home and work," said the 27-year-old Windels. "And you can go with your friends. Discussing film and loving film, I think, has been a real draw since COVID, in a different type of place where there aren't any other obligations."

Global box office figures back that up. The $8.6 billion worldwide grosses in 2025 were the second-best since the box office cratered in 2020.

Jesse Bishop programs movies for the Main, where at least one of five screens is often playing a title from Zoomer favorite A24 Films, the company that released hits including "Marty Supreme" and "Everything Everywhere All at Once." He agreed that the pandemic is a big piece of the puzzle. Especially since the University of Minnesota campus, located a mile and a half from the Main, provides a steady stream of new customers in that age group.

"Gen Z was trapped at home for that whole period when they were young. And I think in general, it's the young people who tend to want to be not cooped up at home now. So it makes sense that they're finding refuge in going to the movies," Bishop said.

Selma Erickson, 27, finds that refuge two or three times a week. Erickson, who jokes that she's "committing highway robbery against AMC" theaters by using her $25-a-month loyalty card so often, said, "I really, really like the collective experience of doing something with all these strangers."

The phenomenon of Zoomers re-embracing theaters has parallels in other analog re-discoveries.

"Look at vinyl albums. There's a huge boom. DVDs and other physical media are becoming more popular with Gen Z as well. They're digital natives, but they're becoming analog fanatics," Dergarabedian said. "During those two hours, you're not on your phone. You're literally unplugged from technology, unless you're kind of rude."

Alex Kormann / The Minnesota Star Tribune / TNS

All four movies showing at the Edina 4 last week targeted portions of Gen Z.

Aaron Lavinsky / The Minnesota Star Tribune / TNS

Molly Zuzek and her sister, Hannah Zuzek, went all pink for the "Barbie" screening at the Main Cinema in 2023.

Recapturing attention spans

Windels thinks unplugging is not just a part of going to the movies, but a deliberate choice among his peers: a one-screen experience in an increasingly two-screen world.

"This generation has grown up with screens in their hands their whole lives and now they're trying to recapture their attention spans," said Windels. "I think people are consciously trying not to second-screen watch, like with Netflix at home. They're trying to give their whole attention to it and movie theaters are a great place to experience that."

Teuber concurred. He values "the social contract of a movie theater, which is that you're not going to go on your phone, you're not going to be loud, you're all paying attention and then you're all experiencing someone else's perspective."

Beyond putting away his phone and eschewing streaming (he doesn't subscribe to any streaming services), Teuber says going to independent cinemas and participating in things like post-screening Q&As offers an additional degree of engagement with movies, a human one that skips the algorithms used by streaming apps to influence us.

He's compelled by curated films and film events because they "are always, always going to be worth more of anyone's time than whatever the algorithm is serving up on the homepage of HBO Max or Netflix or Hulu. I'm so much more interested in having a singular experience that an individual thinks is worth my time."

Hollywood experts have fretted for years that stars no longer guarantee an audience for their movies. Windels believes actors such as Emma Stone and Timothée Chalamet do have loyal followings but thinks informed fans like Teuber "have shifted a little to more behind-the-scenes stuff, the director or the studio. People are putting their trust more in the creative minds behind a movie."

As the audience shifts, so does programming. In addition to A24 films, Bishop said the Main had an outsized hit with Stone's "Bugonia," which sold out screenings for more than three weeks, and "The Secret Agent" (both films were nominated for Oscar's best picture trophy). While older Zoomers are enjoying "Wuthering Heights," Dergarabedian noted that the younger side of Gen Z accounts for PG movies being more successful than PG-13 movies – for the first time ever – in 2024, and again in 2025.

"'Zootopia 2' was PG, 'Wicked 2' was PG. In fact, the highest grossing movie last year, 'Lilo and Stitch' was PG," Dergarabedian said. "It used to be that it wasn't cool for a Gen Z person to go to a PG movie, but now there are so many good ones."

After their brief, post-pandemic panic, experts say it's become clear that streaming movies are merely the latest in a series of supposed threats to moviegoing: the Great Depression, the advent of television and the revolution in home video were all perceived as potential fatal blows for the movies. In each case, Hollywood survived.

"This shift is generationally important, because the Gen Z moviegoers of today are the parents of tomorrow. That's how I got interested in the movies back in the '60s – going with my mom and dad," Dergarabedian said.

In fact, if you take away technologies such as IMAX or Dolby sound, moviegoing has remained pretty much the same since the 1930s – and it'll continue, film experts suggest, into the 2030s and beyond.

Frederic Batier / A24 / TNS

Anne Hathaway in the movie "Mother Mary."

MOVIE REVIEW

'Mother Mary' uses stardom to explore creative process

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

In 2024, Brady Corbet's Oscar-winning "The Brutalist" used architecture as a metaphor for Hollywood filmmaking – the grinding hustle required to craft something epic in scope, infused with a personal story, but ultimately dependent on patrons who might exploit artists rather than support them. One could argue that "Mother Mary" is indie auteur David Lowery's "Hollywood movie" too, in that it's a film that explores the personal hazards of public-facing creative collaboration, using pop music superstardom as the metaphor for filmmaking.

Both film and music – when made on a grand, industrial scale – require collaboration, a team of people who create an aesthetic, and one star, or figurehead, to represent the image. These stars make auteur theory an all too easy answer about who gets the credit for creative genius that comes from many minds, but it runs the risk of significant contributors feeling discarded or resentful.

Lowery explores this in depth in "Mother Mary," while suggesting that these same hurt feelings can be a source of creative energy, pulled from the heart, slapped on a table and shaped into something beautiful. Art can come from the troubling emotions and complex relationships that are often the byproduct of a creative process that is messy, human and complicated.

"Mother Mary" is a phantasmagoric fever dream of a gothic pop opera, but it is also a single setting two-hander that pits two of our most mesmerizing actresses against each other in a verbal pas de deux of wordy accusation and buried betrayals.

International music superstar Mother Mary (Anne Hathaway) shows up at the English estate of famed fashion designer Sam Anselm (Michaela Coel), her former costume designer. Mary is bedraggled and wet, begging for a gown for a comeback performance in a few days. Despite Sam's simmering anger at the way things ended between them, she drags Mary into an old barn for a fitting, where they will work out their issues, whether Mary wants to or not.

There, Sam unleashes reams upon reams of monologues about their past at a teary Mary, who fills in a few gaps. We frequently cut away to Mother Mary concert performances and flashbacks that the women watch like stage plays in the barn. Mary dances; Sam confesses she hasn't listened to her music in years, practically spitting venom at her former friend.

'Mother Mary'

★★

MPA rating: R (for some violent content and language)

Running time: 1:52

How to watch: In theaters

It goes on and on until you're internally begging Lowery to get to the point already. And then suddenly he does. This is a ghost story, a possession tale. But we already knew it was going somewhere dangerous from the outset, thanks to grainy footage of what seems to be a violent onstage incident, and a warning that Mother Mary's opening banger "Burial" is a "curse."

The film finally transitions from the emotional tête-à-tête to the genre piece that was promised, as Sam and Mary discover they've seen the same ghost: a horrifyingly red spectral vision. The spirit enters Mary during a birthday seance facilitated by Imogen (FKA twigs), and she can't shake it.

This gauzy scarlet ghoul and folie a deux between two women calls to mind Peter Strickland's "In Fabric," in which Marianne Jean-Baptiste is tormented by a haunted red dress, and Luca Guadagnino's "Suspiria" remake, filled with twisted modern dance and chest-bursting viscera.

It's also apt to ponder Lowery's own "A Ghost Story," but the most obvious comparison is to Parker Finn's 2024 pop-possession extravaganza, "Smile 2," in which Naomi Scott plays a singer invaded by an insidious smile demon. However, "Smile 2" is both gutsier and more coherent than this cerebral and moody picture. Mary's new single might be called "Spooky Action," but despite a few gory moments, there's not all that much spooky action to be found.

Lowery is more concerned with the nature of creative relationships, and the inherent inequality in what it means to make art at this scale; how one can rip out their own bad feelings and not only make something significant but use it as a way to connect with others, shared threads binding souls together.

Naturally, Lowery's own artistic collaborators are firing on all cylinders. The movie is beautifully crafted, from Andrew Droz Palermo's lushly surreal cinematography, to the songs by FKA twigs, Jack Antonoff and Charli XCX, supported by a score by Daniel Hart.

It certainly casts a spell, but the aesthetic takes precedence as the narrative devolves into atmospheric mush merely interspersed with many images of Hathaway mugging and posing.

There's no question about the talent on display. Coel is one of our most hypnotic screen performers, and had Hathaway decided to put her prodigious talents toward pop stardom instead of an Oscar-winning acting career, she'd be one of our top icons. Her Mother Mary performances are so fantastic it leaves you wanting more – of her, but not necessarily this plodding movie.

SERIES REVIEW

'The Audacity' makes it hard to find anyone to root for in Silicon Valley

By ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Anyone who has spent any time in the digital agora will know the chilling feeling of seeing some supposedly secret thing about yourself suddenly reflected in a targeted advertisement. In a new Silicon Valley soap, "The Audacity," Duncan (Billy Magnussen) founds a company called PINATA, for Privacy Is Not a Thing Anymore, which will allow subscribers to snoop at a deep level on just about anyone in the world; the war against the data eaters, the name suggests, is long since lost, and is none of your business, anyway.

Created by Jonathan Glatzer who has written for "Succession" and "Better Call Saul," the series premiered Sunday on AMC, the network of "Breaking Bad," "Mad Men" and an earlier tech-related series, "Halt and Catch Fire," about the rise of the personal computer – shows that focus on difficult, sometimes amoral characters whose shenanigans might change the world, not necessarily for the better. "The Audacity," though well made enough, is not in their league.

Duncan made his fortune as a co-founder of a community app something along the lines of Facebook (which, along with Mark Zuckerberg, doesn't exist in this silicon reality – "If only," do I hear you sigh? Or was that me?) Now he's trying to sell his information-gathering startup to "Cupertino" (as in the home of Apple), "the most important tech company to ever exist," and leaking rumors he imagines will be to his advantage. Duncan is not himself a creator, or particularly smart – he thinks it's "Schroeder's Cat," for example – but does have a gift for selling; his "genius" late partner, Hamish – a suicide – did the real work. Now a new Hamish enters his life in the form of Harper (Jess McLeod, whose blonde bob may remind viewers of the brilliant coder played by Mackenzie Davis on "Halt and Catch Fire"), the creator of the "algo" mentioned above.

Ed Araquel / AMC / TNS

Billy Magnussen stars as Silicon Valley tech CEO Duncan in AMC's "The Audacity."

Despite his riches, Duncan is unhappy enough to be a patient of the series' other main character, therapist JoAnne (Sarah Goldberg). (He also has an "ayahuasca guy.") Most prominent among her other clients is Carl (Zach Galifianakis), a semi-retired industry legend who made his money from a spam platform and whom Duncan will spend much of this eight-episode season attempting to impress. "People act like we took something as if we didn't build everything they touch," Carl will complain to JoAnne. "Where's our parade? All I see are pitchforks and ingratitude."

JoAnne conducts her business from her rented home, as does her child psychiatrist (second) husband, Gary (Paul Adelstein), one of the few figures in this roundelay you will be given no reason to dislike. (It's an old house, to contrast it with the modernist leviathans inhabited by the overly moneyed class.) Sharing the place is her weedy, newly arrived 15-year-old son, Orson (Everett Blunck), sent reluctantly from Baltimore, where his father is being treated for cancer. Orson has embarrassing gastric issues and watches alpha-male videos in the basement, where he also practices the bassoon. (That he's working on "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," in its way a story of runaway tech, might have some thematic meaning, though it does also have a killer bassoon part.)

Something Duncan says in a session with JoAnne leads her to unload some stock, like Martha Stewart in 2004, and Duncan, working this out, blackmails her into passing on inside information from her clients to him. "You think you know everything because you have information, but information is not insight," says JoAnne, who has insight to spare, making herself even more valuable to Duncan, whose pronouncements are more in the line of "Cheaters never lose, and losers, they never cheat" and "Empathetic is just pathetic with a prefix – I am an apex predator."

Anushka (Meaghan Rath), a power player who works for Duncan, is also a toothless director of ethical innovation on the board at Cupertino. She's married to Martin (Simon Helberg), who is working on something he calls Alexander, or Xander – he would say "someone," probably – "an intelligent entity, more of an autonomous companion, for alienated teens based on personal data ecosystems."

He has less time for his own alienated teen, Tess (Thailey Roberge) – "Dad, eyes on me," she says, as the family sits at a comically long dinner table, the parents looking at their phones – who has been expressing herself through low-level vandalism and thievery. "I hear you're klepto now," says Jamison (Ava Marie Telek), the daughter of Duncan and Lili (Lucy Punch), whose body mass is under constant review by her mother. Seemingly, all the children of the Valley are being shuttled by their parents toward Stanford, where they will matriculate by hook or by crook.

Though Lili has been configured as shallow and spoiled, Punch (a great comic actor) injects her with some warmth and keeps her from being the joke she might have been. Galifianakis has a native oddball energy, though some of Carl's assigned interests feel tacked on and out of joint – he's involved with a fight club, where "control alt delete" serves for saying "uncle," and, even weirder, has been made a World War Ire-enactor and military fetishist; it's a point that exists only to make him receptive to Tom (Rob Corddry), the deputy undersecretary of Veterans Affairs who has come to Palo Alto looking for a partner to digitize truckloads of files that will in some way help to better their plight. ("Straightforwardly, what's the quant ben for us?" he's asked. Translation: "What's in it for us?") The series' designated tragic figure, he's granted a karaoke performance, with original lyrics, of Peggy Lee's "Is That All There Is?"

Much of the action has to do with characters buying and selling various enterprises, or failing to, and creating and breaking and creating alliances, and it ceases to matter after not too long awhile what person or which company does what. Much less of it has to do with people being people. The cast is very good and the dialogue good enough, but because few of these characters are developed beyond a handful of identifying characteristics, it's a generally cold, dispassionate watch. As to Duncan, the nominal star of the show, it doesn't matter whether he'll win or lose – there's not enough to hang on to. Past being unlikable, he's unsympathetic, and worse, for all his noisy behavior, uninteresting. JoAnne, though her journey is more twisted, doesn't fare all that much better.

To signal that he has considered these things, Glatzer gives Anushka, who has had a revelation, a speechy little speech to voice the thoughts already on your mind. "When was the last time we saw tech help? … Truth be told, what have we actually made better? Did we spread knowledge? No. People used to occasionally agree on truth. Are we more tolerant of those different from ourselves? Please. Absolutely blew it on climate. Data centers emit more greenhouse gas than all of air travel. And have we made made the lives of our children better? Probably, no. But we can have Q-tips at our door in an hour. Huzzah." So true.

We also get a reminder, from Harper, to check the box that keeps a website from selling your information. It's good advice.

BOOKS

George Takei's book chosen for 'West Coast's largest book club'

By ANGELA LIM
The Seattle Times (TNS)

SEATTLE — George Takei was 5 years old when he heard U.S. soldiers, who carried rifles with bayonets, pounding on the door of his home in Los Angeles.

In 1942, following the signing of Executive Order 9066, soldiers instructed his parents to quickly pack their belongings and vacate the house. His family could "take only what we could carry and nothing more," Takei said, as they and other Japanese Americans were jammed into buses and sent to live in horse stables at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia, California. Takei, his younger brother and parents were later moved to the Rohwer War Relocation Center in Arkansas, enclosed within layers of barbed wire fences.

"We were all categorized just, arbitrarily, as 'enemy alien,'" Takei told The Seattle Times in a recent interview. "There was no due process, no trial."

Takei's childhood experiences of living in incarceration camps during World War II, he said, are burned into his memory, inspiring the 2019 graphic novel "They Called Us Enemy, by Takei, Justin Eisinger and Steven Scott, and illustrated by Harmony Becker. Now, patrons of more than 190 library systems, over 50 of them in Washington state, will read the work as part of One Book, One Coast, billed as "the West Coast's largest book club.

"I'm always delighted to have people read my book," said Takei, the actor, activist and social media influencer best known for portraying helmsman-turned-captain Hikaru Sulu on "Star Trek." "I'm still a little shocked when I learn that there are other Americans that know very little, if anything, about the imprisonment of innocent citizens of Japanese ancestry simply because we happen to look like the people that bombed Pearl Harbor."

The wartime experiences of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans stand at the forefront of the first One Book, One Coast, which started April 1. Partnering libraries – including those under The Seattle Public Library, King County Library System and more – will host educational activities and programs that supplement "They Called Us Enemy." LA County Library in California, which organized One Book, One Coast, chose the book for participants to read because it covers a "critical yet overlooked chapter of American history" and promotes inclusion and justice, according to the library system. The reading program will close with an author talk with Takei at East Los Angeles Library, with a livestream available on Zoom on May 31 and watch parties at several local library branches.

Hayne Palmour IV / The San Diego Union-Tribune / TNS

George Takei smiles as he autographs his book "They Called Us Enemy," during the Never Forget, Our 90th Anniversary Gala, put on by the San Diego Japanese American Citizens League, at the Town & Country Hotel and Convention Center on Sept. 14, 2019, in San Diego.

Starting this month, The Seattle Public Library is hosting several events with Japanese American historical preservation nonprofit Densho and local authors Frank Abe, Tamiko Nimura and Scott Kurashige. The public can expect to learn more about the personal accounts of incarcerated Japanese Americans and the history of anti-Asian violence in the U.S., said Stesha Brandon, the literature and humanities program manager at SPL.

One Book, One Coast grew out of One Book, One County, which LA County Library initially launched with 18 neighboring library systems across Los Angeles County in 2024. While planning for this year's One Book program, the library system said it aimed to extend the reading program to partners across the West Coast.

Though LA County Library has led the organization of One Book, One Coast, SPL helped expand it and offered insights from its past citywide reading programs. In 1998, Seattle became the first city to host a One Book, One City program called If All of Seattle Read the Same Book – now Seattle Reads – a concept that has spread across the country and internationally, allowing community members to engage in literature through reading and discussion.

"Seattle has voracious readers," said Kai Tang, director of library experience and engagement at SPL. "We are one of two UNESCO cities of literature in the U.S. We have some of the highest readership in the country, and so we get a really robust response when we have programs like (One Book, One Coast)."

From April 1 to June 6, all participating library systems will have unlimited digital copies of "They Called Us Enemy" available on the Libby app by OverDrive, according to Heidi Daniel, executive director of King County Library System. KCLS and SPL will also offer digital copies through Hoopla. Patrons can place holds on physical copies or see where physical copies are located on their local library's online catalog, Daniel said.

"Whether you're in Timberland Library, Tacoma or in Seattle … we're having the same conversation, and I just think that there's power in that," Daniel said.

For Densho's event with SPL on April 4, the organization, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, will cover the importance of protecting the oral histories of incarcerated Japanese Americans "in an increasingly more contested political environment in which history is being actively distorted or erased," said Naomi Ostwald Kawamura, the executive director.

The programming of One Book, One Coast "localizes the incarceration story," said Abe, co-author of the graphic novel "We Hereby Refuse: Japanese American Resistance to Wartime Incarceration." On April 8, Abe will discuss works written by incarcerated Japanese Americans at the Central Library, pulling from "The Literature of Japanese American Incarceration," an anthology he co-edited.

"It was the West Coast that was the exclusion zone for the forced removal of Japanese Americans during World War II. We were defined by our residence here in Seattle, Portland, San Francisco and L.A.," Abe said. "So it's the perfect choice by LA (County Library) to … focus on not only just the geographic experience that encompasses all three states, but also choosing a work about incarceration."

Abe helped organize the very first Day of Remembrance in Seattle in 1978, calling attention to what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II and demanding an official apology from the U.S. government. Ten years later, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, in which the government issued an official apology, acknowledged the events as a "grave injustice" and paid $20,000 to every surviving U.S. citizen or permanent resident of Japanese ancestry who was incarcerated.

Now, Abe said, he sees the U.S. reverting back to old patterns, instilling the same fear against immigrant communities. For Abe, it's imperative for people to "feel like you belong to this country in order to fight for it," and he hopes One Book, One Coast encourages these conversations.

"I'm glad we can unite as one coast to help readers see that we can't stand by while all around us – the nation – is once again targeting people based on their differences," Abe continued. "And that, I think, is the takeaway from this program."

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, April 4, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

Hardcover fiction

1. Starside (deluxe ed.). Alex Aster. Avon
2. The Night We Met (deluxe ed.). Abby Jimenez. Forever
3. The Correspondent. Virginia Evans. Crown
4. The Keeper. Tana French. Viking
5. Judge Stone. Davis/Patterson. Little, Brown
6. Upward Bound. Woody Brown. Hogarth
7. Cinder Vale. Peckham/Valenti. King's Hollow
8. Rain of Shadows and Endings (deluxe ed.). Melissa K. Roehrich. Kensington
9. Between Two Fires. Christopher Buehlman. Nightfire
10. This Kingdom Will Not Kill Me. Ilona Andrews. Tor

Hardcover nonfiction

1. The Meaning of Your Life. Arthur C. Brooks. Portfolio
2. Phases. Brandy. Hanover Square
3. The Anatomy of Awakening. Sue Morter. Hay House
4. Strangers. Belle Burden. Dial
5. Psychedelic Therapy. Derveer/Kurlander. Shambhala
6. Let's Get Cooking. Remi Cruz Parsons. Simon Element
7. Stripped Down. Bunnie Xo. Dey Street
8. Open to Work. Roslansky/Raman. Harper Business
9. Capitalism for All. John Hope Bryant. Wiley
10. A World Appears. Michael Pollan. Penguin Press

Trade paperback

1. Game On. Navessa Allen. Slowburn
2. Theo of Golden. Allen Levi. Atria
3. Dear Debbie. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
4. Dungeon Crawler Carl. Matt Dinniman. Ace
5. Project Hail Mary (media tie-in). Andy Weir. Ballantine
6. Want to Know a Secret? Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
7. Hunt the Villain. Rina Kent. Bloom
8. Caught Up. Navessa Allen. Slowburn
9. Remarkably Bright Creatures. Shelby Van Pelt. Ecco
10. Just Friends. Haley Pham. Atria

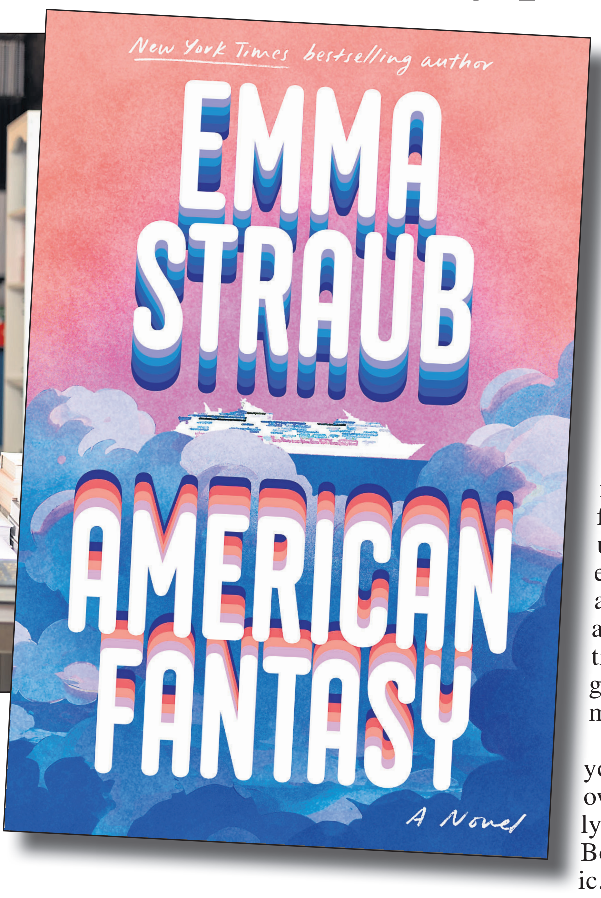
Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

On a New Kids on the Block cruise, Emma Straub found a way past grief

By ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

Matt Licari / Invision

Author Emma Straub poses for a portrait in New York on March 23.



Emma Straub wrote her 2022 novel "This Time Tomorrow" – about a woman who is able to return to her 16th birthday and spend time with her father as a healthy young man – as her own father's health was declining. It was a love letter to the father-daughter bond. A few months later, her father, the novelist Peter Straub, died.

She was deep in grief when an advertisement for a New Kids on the Block fan cruise caught her attention. She ended up among the thousands of fans who set sail on a four-day cruise with the boy band on board. They performed intimate concerts and other events were organized for their supporters to mingle. Straub decided then and there it was perfect setting for her next book.

"For the first time, I had the whole idea," said the author of "Modern Lovers," "All Adults Here" and "The Vacationers." "I knew it was a book. I could write it and I would have the time of my life doing it."

The result was "American Fantasy," released Tuesday. Her protagonist is Annie, a newly single empty-nester who agrees to embark on a fan cruise for a '90s boy band and ends up forming a connection with one of its members.

Straub spoke with The Associated Press about her new book. Responses have been condensed for clarity and brevity.

AP: Why build your story around a fan cruise?

STRAUB: My everyday life is quite small. I walk the same loop, from my bookstore to my kid's school and home. When I leave that, I'm reminded there's a great big world out there. The cruise in particular struck me as novelistic from the get-go. You have a certain number of people trapped together in a small space for a certain number of days. That's a novel right there.

AP: What did you think when you got there?

STRAUB: I went in feeling like an observer. A fan, but really an observer, because it all felt so foreign. Pretty quickly, I realized I wasn't any better than anyone else there. I eavesdropped on everything and knew 100 percent of the New Kids references they were talking about. What impressed me was how much these women had spent so much time and energy planning their experience. They wore costumes, decorated the doors of their cabins and made gifts for each other. These were middle-aged women who had given themselves the gift of doing something purely for their own pleasure. I had never seen anything quite like it.

AP: Your main character, Annie, is 50 and going through a divorce. Why put her at that crossroads?

STRAUB: I have so many women friends who have made enormous changes between 40 and 55. They have changed careers, gone back to school, moved across the country, gotten divorced and gotten remarried. I grew up thinking of middle age as a downward slope. That's just not true. We are all still making choices and doing things for the first time. I wanted to spend time with a character who was in that struggle of realizing that and ultimately able to embrace it.

AP: What other research did you do for the book?

STRAUB: I got to know Joe McIntyre from the New Kids. He is smart and funny, and introspective. I wanted to know what it's like to be a middle-aged man who has had this life, and a relationship with these other men who you've known for 40 years, whether you love them or hate them, you're like truly stuck in this work environment. You are yoked to these other men for your entire life. What does that feel like? How does it feel to have these kinds of fans? How it feels to grow up in the public eye? And I was able to ask him all these questions. He was so generous with me.

AP: You and your husband co-own the Brooklyn bookstores Books Are Magic. What have you learned about the publishing world as a bookseller?

STRAUB: In an alternate world, I would be able to say, the things that are selling the most right now are murdery thrillers with this kind of protagonist or, you know, romantasy with dragons or whatever, so I'm going to do that. But, that's not how writing works, you know? If I've learned anything, it is that the best book you can write is always the one that is most personal and most authentic to you. And so, alas, I've yet to have a dragon in one of my books.

AUTOMOTIVE

AUTO REVIEWS

The loudest way to arrive anywhere: 2026 Aston Martin Vantage S Roadster

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

There is a certain kind of person who buys a convertible sports car. They're not interested in practicality. They don't care about cargo space. And they certainly aren't worried about fuel economy, because if you're the sort of person who tracks miles per gallon, you are not the sort of person who buys an Aston Martin.

What you really want is noise, speed and a vehicle that makes you look like you've just arrived from a yacht somewhere in the Mediterranean. Which is exactly why the 2026 Aston Martin Vantage S Convertible exists. Aston Martin has always been very good at designing cars that look expensive, even when parked next to a private jet.

The Vantage S takes the already handsome Vantage and makes it slightly angrier. The grille is wider, the vents are sharper, and there's a small but meaningful spoiler on the back. From certain angles it looks less like a car and more like a predator crouched in tall grass. Without question, it's one of the most beautiful sports cars on sale today. But beauty is expected. And the S? I'll let you guess.

To aid you, consider that under its hood resides a 4.0-liter twin-turbocharged V-8 supplied by Mercedes-AMG and tuned by Aston Martin engineers who appear to have taken a solemn oath to make it as ridiculously powerful as possible. The result is roughly 670 horsepower, 14 horsepower more than the standard Vantage. Now, 670 horsepower channeled through the rear wheels in a two-seat convertible is like giving a chainsaw to a caffeinated squirrel. It's not remotely sensible. Put your foot down and the car lunges forward like it's just remembered it left the oven on. Sixty miles per hour arrives in about 3.3 seconds, and if you keep going it hits 202 mph.

And, of course, the best way to drive this car is with the roof down.

The fabric top folds away in seconds, leaving you exposed to the elements and, more importantly, to the sound of this roadster's V-8. It doesn't merely roar. It detonates. It crackles. It bangs and snarls like an artillery barrage conducted by heavy-metal musicians. Shifting gears generates a thunderclap from the exhaust that makes small children cheer and environmentally conscious cyclists faint. You downshift just to hear the apocalypse echo.

Aston Martin / TNS

Once upon a time, Aston Martins were gorgeous, if slightly soft. They were grand tourers rather than proper sports cars. This one, however, has had a serious workout. The chassis is stiffer and the suspension has been retuned. So, when you approach a corner, no doubt faster than planned, the car doesn't panic. It grips. The front-end bites into the road, the rear follows obediently like the finest automotive ballerina, and you come out the other side feeling like a driving god. That is, until the next corner, when your partner reminds you that you're not.

Inside, the 2026 Aston Martin Vantage S is exactly what you expect from an Aston Martin. Leather and Alcantara everywhere, a 10.3-inch digital instrument cluster and a 12.5-inch touchscreen fitted with Apple CarPlay Ultra that proves Aston Martin has finally joined the 21st century.

The seats are magnificently firm. They're heated and ventilated as well, though the heating system seems to have the temperament of a bored aristocrat, switching itself on whenever it desires, even while the ventilation is blowing cool air at full blast. Why? Because it's British.

Still, the driving position is absolutely perfect. You sit low, staring down a hood that suggests serious speed is about to occur. And the cabin smells like the inside of a billionaire's briefcase, the sort of expensive aroma that implies a discreet tax arrangement.

Being a proper sports car, practicality has been politely shown the door. Storage is minimal. That said, it did manage to swallow my friend Dane's absurd 29-inch suitcase and his carry-on bag. The downside was that he then had to sit holding my perfectly sensible 19-inch suitcase on his lap for the entire journey; frankly an appropriate punishment for a man who packs as though he's fleeing civilization. That said, if you're the sort of person who buys a 670-horsepower British roadster and then starts fretting about cupholders, you have fundamentally misunderstood the assignment.

Ah, yes, there is one small snag: the price. My 2026 Aston Martin Vantage S Convertible started at $211,000 and bottom lined at $249,500. For that much money, you can buy a perfectly decent condominium or (if you're feeling particularly nostalgic) about 50 Japanese cars from the era of the second Bush administration. But here's the thing. None of those will make complete strangers stop and stare as if they've just seen a UFO land in the parking lot. And that's the point.

The 2026 Aston Martin Vantage S Convertible is fast. It's loud. It's rare. It's outrageously expensive. And it's completely unnecessary, which is precisely why it's superb. Because the world doesn't need another sensible car. It needs a 670-horsepower British convertible that sounds like the end of civilization and makes you laugh like a lunatic every time you press the throttle.

In fact, it might just be one of the best Aston Martins ever built.

Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida.

2026 Aston Martin S Vantage Roadster

Base price: $211,000

Powertrain: Twin-turbocharged 4.0-liter V8

Horsepower/Torque: 670/590 pound-feet

EPA rating (combined city/highway): 18 mpg

Fuel required: Premium

Length/Width/Height: 177/78/50 inches

Ground clearance: 3.7 inches

Cargo capacity: 12 cubic feet

Corolla FX Hatch brings affordable Toyota X-citement

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

After a couple of somnolent performance decades while it nerded out on hybrid hegemony, Toyota has awakened from its slumber. Formula One partnership with Haas, GR86 sportscar, GR Corolla hot hatch. Huzzah.

The latest espresso shot is the 2026 Corolla Hatchback FX Editon burning a hole in my driveway.

You can see it from space. Orange paint, white wheels, giant aerofoil hanging off the rear hatchback. The FX Edition hatch follows on the limited-edition FX sedan introduced last year and is a more direct homage to the 1986-88 Corolla FX16 hot hatch from a hot decade of '80s culture: Top Gun, DeLorean DMC-12, ZZ Top, Audi Quattro, Pac-Man, Ferrari F40. But whereas FX16 was a sleeper hellion to take on the Volkswagen Golf GTI, FX Edition flips the script with its gym bod, and ... standard 169-horse Corolla 2-liter under the muscle shirt.

DROOOOOONE! Went the continuously variable transmission when I put my foot into it on Lone Pine Road. And, unlike FX16 of yore, the FX doesn't option a manual.

I miss the '80s.

But with steering-mounted paddle shifters, compact chassis, and sport-tweaked suspension, the FX Edition is still plenty fun to drive.

Diving into rural Michigan twisties, I downshifted from 5th (the manual CVT simulates 10 gears) to 3rd – VROOM-VROOM-VROOM – and rotated through a series of ess curves before getting back on the throttle. VROOM-VROOM-VROOM bask up through the sim-gears.

It's a black-and-white experience compared to the hulking Toyota Sequioa TRD SPORT that I drove earlier this spring – a truck-based tank that is as comfortable off-road as on. The two Toyotas would make a nice garage pair depending on your mood.

FX models (last year a sedan, this year a hatchback. Only 1,600 of the latter will be made) also pair nicely with the Corolla lineup.

Starting at just $27,985, the front-wheel-drive Corolla FX is a sporty bridge between the standard $24,320 Corolla and the performance-focused, all-wheel-drive, 300-horsepower, $41,115 GR Corolla. FX's exterior and interior bring upscale swagger to compete against class leaders like the Kia K4, VW Hyundai Elantra, Mazda3 and King Civic.

The latter is a particularly high bar given its loooong head start on performance models in recent decades while Toyota slept.

My orange tester (white, blue wardrobes also on offer) and white-wheel tester is loaded with standard features, something now expected in this ferociously competive segment: adaptive cruise control, blind-spot assist, wireless charger, wireless Android Auto/Apple CarPlay, digital instrument/infotainment screens, USB-C ports, push-button start.

I jumped into the Corolla, and ... what's this? Comfortable leather and Alcantara seats cradled me like a living room chair. My bony elbows found a soft, leather door arm rest, orange stitching accented the door liners and seats. This is a sub-$30K Corolla?

Long press on the voice command button. "Navigate to Beau's Grillery," I barked.

Google navigation did its thing on the 10-inch display as Android Auto took over.

I fielded a couple of text messages on the screen, then tuned into my Sirius XM app subscription and listened to the news as I drove.

Entering Telegraph Road, I glanced in the mirror for the blind-spot assist warning. Seeing none, I eased into the middle lane, pressed the ACC button on the steering wheel and cruised easily in traffic while maintaining a healthy gap to the traffic in front of me.

When Mrs. Payne joined me, she would toggle the seat heater switch on the console – similar to her Subaru Impreza RS. The comparable Impreza RS (complete with blackout wheels and mirrors for sporty flair) weighs in at $30,690 while leaning into Subaru's all-season vibe with all-wheel drive. No shift paddles, no sport-tuned suspension.

Corolla also offers an all-wheel-drive model off its hybrid line with 134 horsepower and a focus on (40 mpg) fuel economy to take on FWD hybrids from Civic and Elantra..

Did I mention competition in this segment is ferocious?

Corolla FX Edition is best compared to other performance models such as the Honda Civic, Hyundai Elantra, Kia K4 and Mazda.

The three do cabin ergonomics better than Corolla. While Toyota has finally discovered the rocker switch for ACC on its trucks, the Corolla still uses flat buttons for ACC and volume that you have to hunt for with your thumbs (and that are even more difficult to locate at night).

Its competitors, meanwhile, use rocker switches for ACC and volume, making for easy adjustment without taking your eyes off the wheel. Honda/Hyundai/Kia/Mazda consoles are also better equipped for phone charging/storage than Corolla. They are more modern, for that matter, with classy, horizontal layout (hoodless screens in the case of the Koreans) that wouldn't be out of place in premium vehicles.

Rear seat and cargo room? No contest with Honda/Hyundai/Kia offering comfortable rear seats (37-38 inches compared to 30 for Corolla) and more expansive cargo hatches (22-25 cubic feet vs. 18 for Corollas than the Corolla hatchback (and tight Mazda3).

Where King Civic really exerts its authority is in offering two performance hatchback performance options in the "tweener" space between its standard $25K Civic and apex-flattening, $44K Type R. The Civic Sport hatchback sports attractive black trim and wheels for $29,090 while the iconic $32,690 Civic Si sedan bumps up the power to 200 ponies with stiffened suspension and one of the best manual gearboxes this side of Porsche (credit Mazda3 for offering automatic and manual options for its Sport trim).

Surprisingly, Corolla's vaunted quality trails in the compact sedan pool. Its average 79 JD Power rating trails, say, Civic's 82, Elantra's 88 and Impreza's 83. Resale value? A healthy 82, but Civic sits at 88, Elantra 86 and Subie 87.

Credit Toyota, however, for stepping up its performance game in the compact cars. With once accessible sporsters like the Ford Mustang and Dodge Charger increasingly out of range to budget shoppers, the compact car space offers a range of options for under $35K, while also offering welcome utility for car buyers that only have the budget (or apartment garage space) for one car.

I loaded our luggage into the back of the Corolla FX Edition hatch on a chilly March morning and asked Google maps to take us to the airport. Done.

Approaching an ess turn on the way to the interstate, I selected SPORT with the engine mode toggle button (a toggle button!) on the console and the Corolla flawlessly executed the left-right.

"Slow down!" murmured my better half from the right-hand seat. Done.

From F1 to FX, it's nice to have Toyota in the performance game.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

2026 Toyota Corolla Hatchback FX Edition

★★★

Vehicle type: Front-engine, front-wheel-drive, five-passenger sedan

Price: $27,975, including $1,195 destination fee ($29,088 as tested)

Powerplant: 2.0-liter inline-4 cylinder

Power: 169 horsepower, 151 pound-feet of torque

Transmission: Continuously variable automatic with paddle shifters

Performance: 0-60 mph, 8.2 seconds (Car and Driver)

Weight: 3,095 pounds

Fuel economy: EPA, 30 mpg city/38 highway/33 combined

Report card

Highs: Racy looks; fun to drive

Lows: Poor steering wheel ergonomics; CVT drone

TECHNOLOGY

NASA wants to build a base on the Moon by the 2030s

How and why it plans to build up to a long-term lunar presence

By MICHELLE L.D. HANLON
University of Mississippi
(The Conversation)

The next U.S. trip to the Moon isn't about planting a flag. It's about learning how to live and work there.

NASA has just reset its Artemis program, marking a clear strategic shift: Space exploration is moving away from a race to achieve milestones and toward a system built on repeated operations, a sustained presence and lunar infrastructure that could become part of the technology networks we rely on here on Earth.

That shift is reflected in newly announced plans to invest billions of dollars in building a long-term lunar base, with habitats, power systems and surface infrastructure designed to support ongoing human activity. The message? Humans have already normalized travel to space. The next step is normalizing living beyond Earth.

Artemis is NASA's plan to return people to the Moon with the goal of staying. Unlike the short Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s, it consists of increasingly complex missions: flying around the Moon, landing on its surface and eventually establishing a base near the lunar south pole. The program aims to create a reliable way for humans to live and work there, develop technologies useful on Earth and prepare for the journey to Mars.

Rather than moving straight from the upcoming Artemis II crewed lunar flyby to a surface landing, the new road map adds an intermediate mission in 2027. Astronauts will test docking, life-support systems and communications with commercial lunar landers from SpaceX and Blue Origin, but in low Earth orbit, the region roughly 100 to 1,200 miles above Earth's surface, where rescue remains possible.

The first landing near the lunar south pole is now targeted for 2028. This timeline may sound delayed, but in reality, it has been deliberately reset to prioritize building reliable systems that can operate long into the future over speed.

As a professor of air and space law, I've been watching these developments closely. The United States is still in a race – particularly with China – but it is choosing to compete on its own terms. Rather than chasing the fastest possible landing, NASA is focused on building a system that can support repeated missions and a lasting human presence.

From sprint to system

The original Artemis plan aimed to leap quickly from test flights to a crewed landing while simultaneously developing new rockets, spacecraft and landing systems. That approach carried risk. Artemis I, an uncrewed mission, flew successfully in 2022. After a few delays, Artemis II is now nearing launch, with windows planned for early April 2026. But the further jump to a safe and reliable landing remains significant.

NASA's new road map slows the transition deliberately. Instead of stand-alone milestones, NASA is now building a sequence of repeatable steps to gain hands-on experience.

This change includes a substantial new investment, with a multiphase plan for a lunar base with habitats, power systems and the surface infrastructure needed for a long-term human presence on the Moon. Consistent launch cadence and repeatable operations are how teams develop the expertise needed for safe, reliable spaceflight and eventually for traveling to Mars.

This shift is reflected in the decision to pause the planned lunar Gateway station, a small space station intended to orbit the Moon, and prioritize infrastructure on the lunar surface itself, where astronauts will live, work and build over time.

The new changes also emphasize a shifting role for commercial companies. SpaceX's and Blue Origin's lunar landers are integrated into the mission architecture.

The 2027 test mission, for example, will practice docking between crewed spacecraft and new commercial lunar landers in low Earth orbit. NASA is coordinating a network of public and private partners rather than running a single government-run Apollo-like program.

This method spreads risk across partners, lowers costs and speeds development, though success now depends on multiple players working reliably together.

Law follows activity

NASA's road map is not just about lowering technical risk. It is also about shaping the future environment of lunar activity.

International space law, including the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, sets out broad principles to guide space activities, like avoiding harmful interference with others' activities. But those rules only gain real meaning through repeated, coordinated activity, especially on the lunar surface, where desirable landing sites are limited.

Countries and companies that maintain a sustained presence on the Moon will shape the practical expectations everyone will share while living and working on the Moon. One-off demonstrations, like lunar landings, don't shape lunar activity like continued operations would.

Why this matters – even if you never go to space

It would be easy to see these changes as purely technical, but they are not. The structure of a space program shapes what technologies are developed, how industries grow and which countries influence how space is used. Technologies developed for sustained lunar activity, including life-support systems, energy storage and advanced communications, have found applications on Earth, from medicine to disaster response.

There are economic effects as well. The Artemis program supports jobs across the United States and among its international partners. It helps build industries that extend far beyond NASA itself.

And there is a strategic dimension. As more countries and companies operate in space, the question is no longer just who arrives first, but who helps define how activity is carried out. Over time, that presence will likely become part of the infrastructure that supports daily life on Earth.

Communications, navigation, supply chains and scientific data already depend on space-based systems. As activity expands to the Moon, facilities there, from energy systems to communications relay systems that transmit data and signals back to Earth, will become integrated into those networks. What is built on the Moon will not sit apart from life on Earth, but increasingly function as an extension of it.

The Moon is becoming a place where infrastructure, industry and rules and expectations for how humans operate there are already beginning to take shape. NASA's updated plan signals that the United States intends to be present there consistently.

The updates to the Artemis program are a statement about how the United States intends to engage in the next phase of space exploration. Rather than pursuing a single dramatic landing, the U.S. is committing to the steady, repeatable work of building a lasting foothold on the Moon, and redefining humanity's relationship with space itself.

Michelle L.D. Hanlon is a professor of air and space law at the University of Mississippi. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

The Artemis II crew captured this view as the Earth sets behind the Moon during a lunar flyby on Monday.
NASA

GADGETS

Comfortable headset has great noise cancellation

The BlueParrott M500-XT.
BlueParrott / TNS

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

BlueParrott's M500-XT Bluetooth headset is designed for both professional and day-to-day use, with endless features including AI-powered noise cancellation.

The single-piece headset has hands-free cell phone call quality as good as I've experienced, along with probably the most important feature: comfort, designed for extended wear. It's designed to be worn on either ear and weighs less than one ounce. Inside is a 10mm speaker that delivers clear audio.

The battery life is rated at up to 11 hours, but it can vary depending on call length, volume and other factors. The built-in rechargeable lithium-ion battery (USB-C) charges in about 2 hours and has 60 hours of standby time.

But where the BlueParrott M500-XT really stands above its competitors is the AI-powered noise cancellation. It uses two intelligent microphones in a small boom arm to block up to 93 percent of ambient noise. Background noises can include others around you, barking dogs, passing cars or wind. Whatever the distraction, it will be eliminated or minimized during the call.

Buttons on the back control everything. A multi-function button has a variety of programmable features including power on or off, answering or rejecting calls, and accessing voice assistants. The buttons below the multi-function button control volume, and that's where the USB-C charging port is. Lifting the boom microphone up will temporarily mute your call.

Customization can be done on the BlueParrott Button. This includes a one-touch mute for instant privacy and control. Or program it to gain instant access to push-to-talk apps. The BlueParrott mobile app lets you customize some controls. The M500-XT has an IP54 weather- and dust-resistant rating.

Three sets of ear gels are included, along with a USB-A-to-USB-C cable for charging. Bluetooth 5.3 offers a range of up to 300 feet. It allows pairing up to 8 devices, and Multipoint pairing allows two devices to be used simultaneously.

https://www.blueparrott.com/on-the-road-headsets/blueparrott-m500-xt, $119.99

For the most part, the sound coming from computers and laptops is underwhelming. **Cyber Acoustics CA-2110USB compact desktop speakers** are a simple and cost-efficient way to enhance that sound, without any setup time.

The rounded USB-powered (A or C) dual speakers have 12 watts of power and what Cyber Acoustics describes as upward-firing drivers, which pump out room-filling sounds. Compatibility is listed with computers, laptops and USB-enabled devices, including Windows, Mac and Chromebooks.

The modern-looking speakers have a high-quality feel and bring balanced audio for full stereo sound. The setup takes seconds; just plug them into an open USB port, without the need for drivers or software.

Volume is controlled for both speakers on the top of the right speaker. A 4.5-foot cable connects the speaker to a USB port for power. The cable connecting the left and right speakers is 3.3 feet long.

Each speaker measures 3.8 by 3.9 by 3.8 inches. And the best part? They are only $24.99.

https://www.cyberacoustics.com/ca-2110usb-cyber-acoustics-usb-powered-20-speakers

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Tribit's QuietPlus 81 wireless noise-canceling over-the-head headphones are an inexpensive choice with some big features. One that really stands out from its competitors is that you'll get up to 110 hours (that's more than 4.5 days!) of playtime before a USB charge is needed.

Each side has a soft protein-based leather ear pad with memory foam with a 40mm dynamic driver inside that delivers clear audio and a strong bass boost. Bluetooth 6.0 provides a stable connection with your devices, and with multipoint, they can connect and switch between two devices.

Five built-in microphones, along with the Tribit AI algorithm, will help eliminate background noise. As mentioned, you'll get 110 hours of playback on a single charge with the active noise canceling off, or 70 hours with it on. For charging, a 10-minute charge delivers about 5 hours of listening at 50 percent volume.

The Tribit app offers customization and lets you choose between six listening modes. They include music listening, gaming and podcast listening. Hearing protection mode will limit the volume to under 85dB. To activate transparency mode, all you have to do is touch and hold the right ear cup to hear your surroundings. Double-tapping the right ear cup will boost bass output in XBass mode. Double-tap it to turn it off.

Onboard controls all worked well for power, volume, charging and turning the ANC on or off. The 9.98-ounce headset folds for portability and features an adjustable headband, 90-degree rotation of the ear cups, and a 30-degree swing up and down. A USB charging cable and a 3.5 mm auxiliary cable are included.

https://tribit.com/products/tribit-81-headphone, $49.99

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

The Tribit QuietPlus 81.
Tribit / TNS

The Cyber Acoustics CA-2110USB.
Cyber Acoustics / TNS

DESIGN RECIPES

Spring design tips

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Now that winter is out and spring is in, for many this is a time of transition. Convert those décor elements that are dark and heavy representing winter and transition to those that are light, rich and bright. Embrace the fresh colors and patterns of spring.

When looking to brighten your space, consider using some core design tips to give your space a spring boost.

Lighten and layer your color palette

Spring is all about color and vibrance. Bright bursts of color replace the cold colors of winter. Spring is the perfect opportunity to transition from "heaviness" to a style that is light and airy. Swap out heavy textures, dark throws and dark color palettes for lighter fabrics such as linen and cotton.

Bring the outdoors in

Spring is a wonderful opportunity to bring in nature and organic materials. Incorporate fresh greenery, branches or simple florals.

Edit and remove

Now this is a time to re-evaluate and take inventory. Ask yourself, "Does this piece still serve a use in my home or should it be removed or replaced?" Spring is time for renewal, so don't be afraid to swap out your décor.

Create various lifestyle moments that speak to spring

This can be done in various ways, with textiles such as drapery, toss pillows and even area rugs. Consider swapping in fresh, bright colors for those that are darker. Additionally, look for ways to also infuse natural light.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

Handout photos / TNS

TOP: Bright colored toss pillows add "pops" of color to this living room. **ABOVE:** The pairing of blues, green and yellow help to create a bright, fresh feeling in this bedroom.

How should I use my tax refund for home improvements?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

Tax season may not be anyone's favorite time of year, but your refund can be a powerful opportunity to reinvest in your home.

According to Angi's 2025 State of Home Spending Report, homeowners are increasingly prioritizing maintenance and practical upgrades over purely cosmetic projects. With the cost of repairs and homeownership rising, using your tax refund strategically can help you avoid larger expenses later.

The smartest place to start is with what your home needs, not just what you want. It's tempting to jump into a dream renovation, but addressing essential repairs – like leaks, aging systems or worn materials – can save you significantly over time. Small issues, if left unchecked, often turn into much larger and more expensive problems. Think of your refund as a way to protect your home, not just upgrade it.

Another smart use of your tax refund is building – or boosting – a home-maintenance fund. A good rule of thumb is to set aside about 1 percent to 3 percent of your home's value each year for ongoing maintenance and unexpected repairs. If you don't already have a reserve, your refund is a great way to start one, giving you more financial flexibility when issues arise.

If your home is in good condition, your refund can go toward high-impact improvements that enhance your daily life. Many homeowners use their tax refunds for updates in spaces they use most – like kitchens, bathrooms or flooring. These types of projects not only improve how your home functions but can also add long-term value.

For smaller refunds, consider focusing on "mini upgrades" that still make a noticeable difference. Projects like fresh paint, updated lighting, minor repairs or servicing key systems like HVAC can improve comfort and efficiency without requiring a large investment. Even modest updates can refresh your space and prevent future wear and tear.

It's also worth thinking about improvements that help you save money over time. Energy-efficient upgrades – like sealing air leaks, upgrading insulation or installing smart thermostats – can reduce your monthly utility bills and make your home more efficient overall. In some cases, these upgrades may also qualify for rebates or incentives, stretching your refund even further.

The most important step is to plan before you spend. Homeowners often increase their project budgets once they receive their refund, so having a clear list of priorities – needs first, then wants – can help ensure your money is used intentionally. Getting quotes from skilled pros and understanding costs upfront can also help you maximize the impact of your investment.

Your tax refund isn't just extra cash – it's an opportunity to invest in your home wisely. By focusing on maintenance, efficiency and high-impact upgrades, you can make improvements that not only enhance your space today but also protect your home – and your wallet – over the long term.

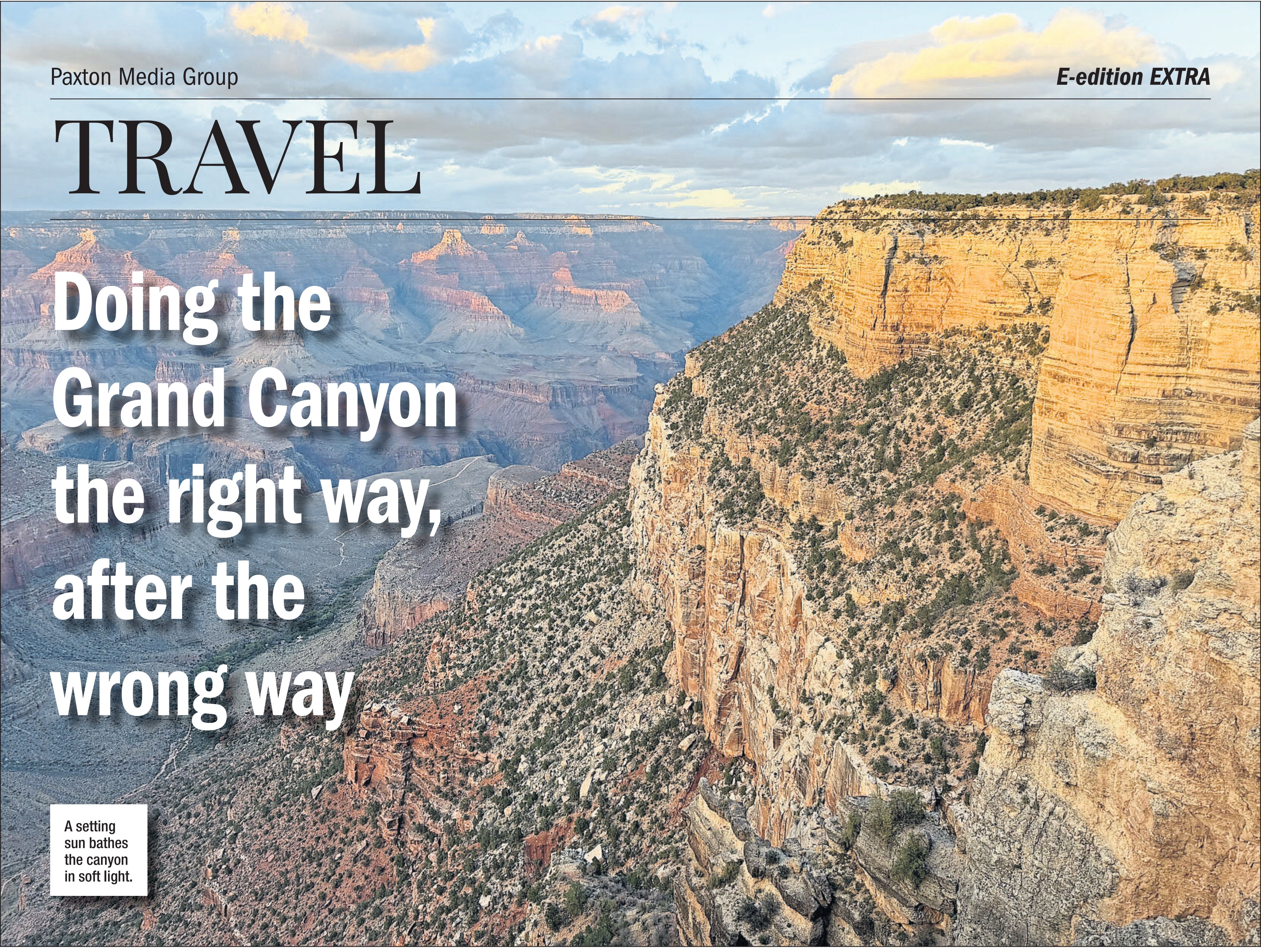
Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.

Dreamstime / TNS

Using your tax refund for essential home maintenance can help prevent bigger, more expensive issues down the line.

TRAVEL

Doing the Grand Canyon the right way, after the wrong way



A setting sun bathes the canyon in soft light.

By LORI RACKL
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Dad opened the back door of our station wagon and glared at me and my sister.

"Get out of the car," he said through gritted teeth.

We'd just pulled into a parking lot at Grand Canyon National Park, one of the stops on our family road trip. Tired, hot and cranky, my sister (a tween) and I (a teen) had no interest in exploring what I might have uncharitably described as "just a big hole."

Dad's demeanor made it clear that the "No" on our Magic 8 Ball was not an acceptable answer. So, with all the eyerolls and palpable disdain we could muster, my sister and I sulked at a crowded lookout spot along the canyon rim before crawling back into the air-conditioned station wagon.

Mission accomplished. I'd been to the Grand Canyon.

But even then, I knew I hadn't really been to the Grand Canyon. This dirty little secret gnawed at me for decades.

What I didn't know at the time, besides just about everything, was that Future Me would love being in the great outdoors. Especially if it involved hiking. Future Me would also be a travel writer. And a travel writer who's into hiking shouldn't have her sole trip to the Grand Canyon revolve around pouting in family photos. I needed to go back, to atone for the sins of my teenage past and give this world-renowned landmark another shot.

That's why, in my mid-50s, I signed up for Intrepid Travel's three-day hiking trip in the Grand Canyon. The compact itinerary promised treks along some of the park's most famous trails, taking us below the rim – something done by a surprisingly small percentage of the park's roughly 5 million annual visitors. Most folks simply soak up the views from the edge of the canyon, snap some selfies and move along.

The trip called for spending two nights in the historic El Tovar hotel, a National Historic Landmark built 120 years ago to accommodate well-heeled tourists arriving by rail. Reservations for El Tovar's restaurant and 78 guest rooms tend to get snapped up well in advance.

Another appealing feature of my Grand Canyon adventure sequel: This time, I'd have a guide, an expert who could enlighten me about the geology, ecology and cultural history of this space long held sacred by the Havasupai, Navajo, Hopi and other Native American tribes.

That expert turned out to be Danielle Tilley, or Dani, a seasoned guide at Wildland Trekking. (Intrepid Travel recently acquired Wildland, a Flagstaff, Ariz.-based company specializing in small-group hiking and backpacking tours.)

A dynamo of a hiker and indefatigable devotee of the canyon, Dani had an infectious enthusiasm about her outdoor office – a biodiverse, geological display of nearly 2 billion years of earth history from river to rim.

"The rocks are old but the canyon is young," Dani explained, pulling lunch supplies out of her seemingly bottomless backpack. Our picnic spot was Skeleton Point, a dusty perch overlooking the Colorado River far below.

The river carved its deep path through this rocky landscape only 6 million years ago, which is pretty recent if you're a 4.5 billion-year-old planet. The fast-flowing waterway and subsequent erosion exposed a colorful layer cake of sandstone, shale and other rock, stacked one on top of another in chronological order.

"The canyon walls are like a giant timeline," said Dani, as she passed out plates of tortilla wraps and sliced fruit to our group of five.

We'd hiked 3 miles on the South Kaibab Trail to reach our scenic pitstop at Skeleton Point. That was the easy part. We had to hike those same 3 miles to get back up to the rim, climbing 2,000 feet along the way. Temperatures heat up the further down you go in the canyon, adding to the challenge.

Hiking here can be deceptively difficult – another reason I was glad to have a guide. The National Park Service responds to an average of more than 300 search-and-rescue incidents each year, swooping in to provide medical care, water rescues and helicopter evacuations. Dani made sure we took it slow and stayed hydrated.

While we used our breaks to catch our breath, Dani took advantage of these lulls in the action to teach us more about the canyon. She told us about successful efforts to reintroduce California condors to the park and the struggle of native fish species to survive after the river was dammed. She pointed out the agave plants Indigenous people relied on as part of their diet, slowly roasting the agave hearts in dugout pits still peppered throughout the canyon. We got a sense of how important the park and its surrounding area is to Native American tribes, such as the Hopi, whose origin story traces their ancestors' emergence from the underground world to a mineral spring where the Colorado and Little Colorado rivers converge.

The canyon brims with clues about the people and animals who existed here long before the park became tourist catnip. Cave s shelter the bones of giant sloths that went extinct. A salmon-colored boulder on Bright Angel Trail shows reptilian footprints dating back more than 300 million years – the oldest vertebrate fossil tracks ever found within the park's 1.2 million-acre boundaries.

On another section of the well-trodden Bright Angel Trail, in a place known as Mallery's Grotto, red paintings of deer dot the cliff face. The images were made by Native American denizens of the canyon, such as the Havasupai people who lived and farmed in the fertile grounds far below the rim. They were forcibly removed from this region in the 1920s, shortly after the Grand Canyon became a national park. At the tribe's request, this part of the park was recently renamed Havasupai Gardens.

From the rim, I took a photo of a ribbon of lush cottonwood trees sprouting from Havasupai Gardens, some 3,000 feet down. I also took photos of the canyon walls glowing in the setting sun. Let's just say that over three days, I took a lot of photos.

When I texted some of my best shots to my now grown-up sister, I got this cheeky response: "I don't want to look at these pictures," she texted back, channeling our younger selves. "I'm hot and tired."

My sister also returned to the Grand Canyon after our initial visit. She brought her three kids, who seemed to appreciate it much more than their mom and aunt did in the 1980s. The panoramic vistas, towering buttes and impossibly vast landscapes haven't changed much since then. She and I have. And that made all the difference.

Photos by Lori Rackl / TNS

Red deer pictographs made by Native Americans are visible from the Bright Angel Trail.

A boulder on Bright Angel Trail shows reptilian footprints dating back more than 300 million years – the oldest vertebrate fossil tracks ever found within the park's 1.2 million-acre boundaries.

Grand Canyon National Park draws roughly 5 million visitors a year.

Hiking guide Dani Tilley on the South Kaibab Trail, with the sandstone summit of O'Neill Butte in the distance.

Las Vegas' most exciting new opening is a seafood restaurant from Mexico City

By JENN HARRIS
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

"I didn't want to put a Contramar here," said Gabriela Cámara, seated in the dining room of her new restaurant at the Fontainebleau Las Vegas. "I didn't believe a restaurant like Contramar can actually have a replica."

Then she proved herself wrong.

Cantina Contramar, a spinoff of Contramar, the seafood-centric Mexico City restaurant she founded nearly three decades ago, opened in late March. Located at the northern end of the Strip, it has the essence of the Roma Norte original, only reimagined for a Las Vegas crowd.

The restaurant is perched above the casino on the second floor, next to a food hall that boasts lobster rolls, burgers, pizza, sushi and, yes, tacos. Las Vegas is a mecca for cuisines from around the world, including Mexican, but Cantina Contramar is arguably the most significant opening by a Mexican chef in the city. Cámara's innovative tostadas, grilled fish and tacos helped define Mexican cuisine in Mexico City, and beyond, with many Contramar creations now part of the country's seafood lexicon.

In the months leading up to opening, the Vegas setting for her restaurant started to click. Cámara has highlighted the ways food and politics intertwine throughout her career, having implemented health insurance for staff and equitable tip sharing in her restaurants years before it was part of a larger conversation happening in the industry. And Vegas' long history as an established hospitality hub meant creating opportunities for the city's vast Latino workforce, which accounts for more than 50 percent of the hotel and restaurant workers represented by the city's Culinary Workers Union.

"Vegas started making sense because of the hiring possibilities and because so many people with Mexican backgrounds and other Latino backgrounds were very excited about working in a restaurant that would be on this level, and Mexican food," she said.

And it's not lost on Cámara that in the midst of ICE raids targeting undocumented workers and Latino communities across the country, she is opening a restaurant that celebrates Mexican cuisine and culture in one of our country's most popular international travel destinations.

"I find it a total honor to be able to make a Mexican restaurant here, now," she said. "An honor, but a great responsibility to do it right."

Patrick T. Fallon / AFP via Getty Images / TNS
The Fontainebleau Las Vegas hotel and casino stands on the Las Vegas Strip in Las Vegas, Nevada on Feb. 7, 2024.

At the age of 22, she opened Contramar in a Roma warehouse with no formal restaurant or culinary training, serving variations on the beach food she enjoyed during weekend trips to Zihuatanejo. It was stylish but comfortable, quickly becoming both a local and international destination, with bow-tie-clad servers delivering plates of tostadas and tacos that, over the last 28 years, have become synonymous with Mexico City cuisine.

"Contramar is a kind of cantina, an informal place where people meet to have a good time – very accessible" she said. "I thought cantina was a better term for defining what this could be, but a little more chic, because Vegas is not a shack on the beach, right?"

In Vegas, she's introduced more meat-centric dishes, with Wagyu carne asada, short rib with black adobo and a dry-aged tomahawk steak. The aguachile negro de res may be the most emblematic of the Vegas menu, bridging Cámara's signature seafood preparations and the bolder, more traditional red meat dishes one might expect from a Vegas restaurant. Slivers of domestic Wagyu tenderloin sit in a deep salsa negra fortified with soy sauce. On top of each piece, a small mound of diced cucumber and avocado dressed in a leche de tigre spiked with serrano pepper.

Her most famous dish, the tuna tostada, makes an appearance at Cantina Contramar, with a smoky chipotle mayonnaise smeared onto a crisp tostada, the entire surface nearly covered in panes of fresh tuna, fried leeks and a single thick slice of avocado. As well as her most recognizable fish, a whole, butterflied white fish, beautifully charred on the grill and painted with both red adobo and a garlic-parsley rub.

The goal is for that pescado a la talla to taste the same as the one presented in her Mexico City dining room, but sourcing for Cantina Contramar has posed its challenges in the weeks leading up to the opening. Two weeks ago, Cámara was in the midst of what she described as a "lime crisis," in which she was presented with lime juice instead of fresh citrus.

"I was like, 'Oh no, no, no, no, we are not going to use that,'" she said. "It's a hard time for limes even in Mexico, so we just needed to get good limes from California. I've been very stubborn in getting what we need."

While she uses snapper at Contramar, Cantina Contramar features rock cod for the pescado a la talla, or whatever white fish she can procure from as local a source as possible, working with purveyors in California, Baja and the Gulf of Mexico. The mushrooms featured in her mushroom adobo tacos are from Desert Moon Farms in Las Vegas.

The restaurant nixtamalizes its own corn. The crumbles of chorizo on the queso fundido are all made in-house.

"I hope diners are pleasantly surprised about how varied Mexican food can be," she said. "It's very sophisticated without being impossible to understand."

Behind the Cantina Contramar bar is an extensive selection of agave spirits and an emphasis on bottles from Casa Dragones. Bertha González Nieves, co-founder of the small-batch tequila producer, was the one who put Cámara in touch with the hotel and serves as an advisor for the restaurant. Her tequilas are featured in many of the restaurant's signature cocktails, including a take on a Paloma, and the Dragones Rosa, with Casa Dragones Blanco tequila, Bianco vermouth, tomato, guava and lime.

The noted Mexican architect Frida Escobedo designed the space. Diners enter through a passageway lined with tiles that range across a spectrum of indigo to ocean blue. The main dining area is a sprawling room with high ceilings, pale wood and cool tiles reminiscent of the original Contramar.

"I have never been a Vegas person, just because it's never sort of been in my universe," she said. "I am very curious to see how this develops. Most of the staff do speak Spanish, and it's very important that this is a Mexican restaurant where we are making tortillas, cutting our fish from scratch and doing things how we have always done them."

T-Mobile Arena at 10: Las Vegas venue marks its first decade

By MICK AKERS
Las Vegas Review-Journal (TNS)

LAS VEGAS — It's been 10 years since the T-Mobile Arena officially opened its doors and helped to usher in an era of major professional sports and top-tier entertainment in Las Vegas.

On April 6, 2016, Las Vegas locals the Killers christened the $375 million facility with comedian and talk show host Jimmy Kimmel, who grew up in Las Vegas, introducing the band. "There's no one better to baptize this new venue," Kimmel said in a prerecorded video played before the Killers took the stage that day. "Mr. Las Vegas" himself, Wayne Newton, served as the opening act.

That inaugural year saw a bevy of events including UFC 200 as well as concerts featuring Guns N' Roses, Garth Brooks, George Strait and Billy Joel. On May 7, 2016, the arena hosted its first boxing match, with Saul "Canelo" Alvarez viciously knocking out Amir Khan in front of 16,540 fans.

"It's been an amazing 10 years of being open, longer than that when you get down to the pre-planning stages of it," said Dan Quinn, senior vice president of entertainment and arena venue operations for MGM Resorts International. "Anytime you have the dreams and visions of a project like this, to get to see it go from an image on a piece of paper to building it, to then actually having hosted all the events we've had for the 10 years, I mean, it's just been an incredible run."

Showing how T-Mobile Arena set the stage for the future of sports and entertainment in Las Vegas, each one of the aforementioned entities has performed or been part of an event at Allegiant Stadium, outside of Khan and the UFC.

"I think we've shown that the building is capable of handling any event," Quinn said.

Over the last 10 years the 20,000-fan capacity arena, just steps from the Strip, has hosted almost 1,000 events, a total that accounts for 12.6 million tickets sold and over $2 billion in total ticket revenue, according to MGM Resorts. During those events, 5 million fountain sodas have been poured and around 1 million hot dogs and servings of popcorn have been served.

The NHL era of Las Vegas began at T-Mobile Arena on Sept. 26, 2017, in an exhibition match against the Los Angeles Kings.

Ellen Schmidt / Las Vegas Review-Journal / TNS
The Las Vegas Aces face the Indiana Fever in front of a sold out crowd during the first half of a WNBA basketball game at T-Mobile Arena on Tuesday, July 2, 2024, in Las Vegas.

The team's next appearance at "The Fortress," as the arena has been nicknamed, on Oct. 10, 2017, was a more meaningful one, not just because it was the franchise's first regular season home game, but because it was just nine days after the Route 91 Harvest festival shooting on Oct. 1, 2017.

The game opened with an emotional tribute to those affected by the mass shooting and it was the start of the team's rallying of the community in the aftermath of the tragedy. That historic first season, the Knights went all the way to the Stanley Cup Final, losing in five games to the Washington Capitals.

The Knights have played 412 games at T-Mobile Arena since their 2017 debut, with no game more memorable than on June 13, 2023, when they beat the Florida Panthers to win the Stanley Cup.

"Getting to raise the cup was an incredible experience," Quinn said.

Golden Knights president of business operations, John Penhollow, who joined the organization last summer, had watched the Knights success at T-Mobile Arena from afar. But in his first 10 months on the job, he has has seen that The Fortress is truly the team's home.

"It's amazing to see how it's become the home for the Golden Knights," Penhollow said. "It didn't take long in that first year for the fans to feel the arena out, find their spots. It didn't take long for the hockey team to sort of feel out how they're going to play inside that arena. … You can call it home ice advantage, whatever you want to call it, but we do feel like when we're home, we always have a chance.

"Every game's exciting, win or lose," Penhollow continued. "Even the games we've lost, they've been exciting for our fans and certainly the community. I would say that the first nine years, we couldn't have asked for much more, especially when you consider it was built without the Golden Knights really there to sit at the table."

The UFC has called T-Mobile Arena the "Home of UFC" since 2017 when the MMA fight promotional company signed a deal with the arena. UFC recently extended that deal, and has signage in the building above the seating area to remind fans of that.

"It's incredible that we've already been at T-Mobile Arena for ten years," UFC president and CEO Dana White said in a statement. "We just signed an extension with them so we will continue to bring the biggest and best events to Las Vegas for years to come."

UFC has held 35 events at the arena, which is about 6 miles from the MMA promoter's headquarters. The most recent UFC event at T-Mobile Arena was on March 7 with UFC 326, headlined by Charles Oliveira's decision win over Max Halloway in their middleweight showdown.

The showroom must go on: Spotlight still shines on classic Vegas venues

By JOHN KATSILOMETES
Las Vegas Review-Journal (TNS)

LAS VEGAS — When Donny Osmond starred in the 1991 London Palladium revival of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," famed director Steven Pimlott told the headliner: "The theater is a place where people come to dream in public, and you're in charge of the dream."

Osmond wrote down that comment and still adheres to it. The "Puppy Love" legend picks up the theme in a phone chat: "When people walk in, whether they're sitting in the orchestra section, booths or at a table, the lights dim and – boom! – the show starts. It's another world, another realm."

Over the decades, whether with his brothers or sister Marie, Osmond has performed in some of Vegas' most famous realms. Among them: the Las Vegas Hilton Theater (today's International Theater at the Westgate), the long-ago disassembled Circus Maximus at Caesars Palace, the Flamingo Showroom (for 11 years in the Donny & Marie residency) and currently Harrah's Showroom.

Venues such as Circus Maximus, the Copa Room at the Sands, the Crystal Room at the Desert Inn and the Versailles Showroom at the Riviera are part of Las Vegas lore. Over the eras, custom-designed theaters have largely supplanted one-design-fits-all showroom architecture. This has been especially true for Cirque du Soleil's productions on the Strip, created specifically for the shows' unique technology and staging.

But a few stately showrooms still stand. Some have been tweaked here and there. Others have been built more recently, but in the spirit of the classics. Our greatest hits list:

Flamingo Showroom

This venue remains true to its original design, dating to Wayne Newton's days as headliner in 1963. Newton once said he liked the room because "You have the chance to build conversations, and friendships, with strangers at the tables." The room is rife – rife, I tell you! – with baquettees.

Capacity: 728

Principal headliners: Piff the Magic Dragon, "RuPaul's Drag Race Live"

Harrah's Showroom

Where Sammy Davis Jr. and, later, Clint Holmes headlined, this is Donny Osmond's baby these days, with a new sound and light system to his specs. But he maintains multiple levels of booths with proper seating near the front. An underrated showroom experience for a proven star.

Capacity: 535

Principal headliners: Osmond, "MJ Live" tribute to Michael Jackson

International Theater at Westgate

The fabled Elvis showroom during his Vegas residency from 1969 to '76. Barbra Streisand (who opened the room), Newton, Liberace, Tina Turner and Tony Bennett are among its scores of headliners. The venue was remodeled from its booths and tables design to a proper theater when Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Starlight Express" rolled into Vegas. The theater was modified once more, with a half-dozen booths returned, when "Graceland Presents Elvis: The Exhibition —The Show – The Experience" opened in the spring of 2015. Leave it to the King to posthumously dial up a vintage redesign.

Capacity: 1,541

Principal headliner: Barry Manilow

Westgate Cabaret

The International's sidesaddle showroom, formerly known as the Shimmer Cabaret in the Las Vegas Hilton days. It features VIP tables near the stage in a unique, moat-style seating area, and table seating throughout. It's comparatively intimate, but with balcony seating. An often-underappreciated jewel box.

Capacity: 248

Principal headliners: Magician Jen Kramer, "The King Comes Home" Elvis tribute, "Soul of Motown"

Plaza Showroom

Refreshed and refurbished over the past few years, a gift from an otherwise ill-fated organized crime vehicle, "A Mob Story," and as a result of the design of the wonderful variety show "Mavericks" from Amy Saunders. Cocktail tables and booths on every seating platform, clear view of the stage, LED technology, and chandeliers overhead. The room is vintage but upgraded to host NCAA Tournament viewing parties and even competitive eating competitions. Now we just need a show; we'd love to see Saunders back with a concept.

Capacity: 615

Principal headliners: TBD

Strat Theater

The second-floor room makes an old-school scene with booths on multiple levels, circular cocktail tables, a lot of space to roam for fans and, in the case of the "Rouge" adult revue, the cast. SPI Entertainment has upgraded the LED screens and sound setup. Another "reveal" experience where one wouldn't anticipate a classic Vegas showroom.

Capacity: 600

Principal headliners: "Rouge"

Golden Nugget Showroom

Historic call here, as the venue where Frank Sinatra once headlined is much more of a proper theater than a showroom design. But the showroom still holds its original configuration from Sinatra's headlining run from 1984 to '89, the era when he recorded his "Live From Las Vegas" album. Even Ol' Blue Eyes' dressing room is still intact.

Capacity: 600

Principal headliners: Impressionist Gordie Brown; rotation of classic rock bands in the hotel's Friday night series

South Point Showroom

Perhaps you remember the nightclub Fever. It was in this space for 63 days in 2007, shortly after Michael Gaughan took over ownership of the resort. The venue was brought back to classic configuration, long tables, cocktail tables, booths and even bar seating. State-of-the-art LED, lighting and sound and affordability make it a locals favorite.

Capacity: 400

Principal headliners: the Righteous Brothers, Bronx Wanderers, Human Nature

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